



UNIVERSITY OF  
CALGARY

FACULTY OF ARTS  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
COURSE OUTLINE

ENGLISH 527

Advanced topic in a selected author: **Carol Shields**

Winter 2023

Tuesdays, 17:00 to 19:45

SS 1153/Seminar

<b>Instructor</b>	Professor Aritha van Herk (she/her)
<b>Email:</b>	vanherk@ucalgary.ca
<b>Web Page:</b>	D2L (access via MyUofC portal)
<b>Office Hours:</b>	Available for ZOOM or in-person consultations, by appointment or 15:00 – 16:00, Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

**Office:** SS 1132

**E-mail:** [vanherk@ucalgary.ca](mailto:vanherk@ucalgary.ca)

**I check e-mail regularly, usually within 48 hours; however, do not expect me to reply to a query within minutes.**

**Office hours:** 15:00 – 16:00, Tuesday/Wednesday

**Twitter:** @validmavericitycalgary

**Homepage:** <http://english.ucalgary.ca/profiles/aritha-van-herk>

**Course description:** An in-depth examination of Carol Shields as writer, critic, and biographer.

The writings of Carol Shields comprise an astonishing achievement. In her life, she authored three collections of poetry, nine novels, three gatherings of short fiction (collated in *Collected Stories*), three works of biography and criticism, and seven works of drama, as well as editing two collections of essays by others (*Dropped Threads*). Her body of work and many awards (Arthur Ellis Award for Best Canadian Mystery, Governor General's Award for Fiction, National Book Critics Circle Award, the Pulitzer Prize, Orange Prize, and *Prix de Livre*) declare her importance. More germane to our study will be her approach to meta-textual fiction, material detail, gender, and what has been called “radical ordinariness” or “the profundity of the mundane.” This course will study the work of this author through the lens of genre and etched narrative, with attention to that aspect of trajectory and its resonance, how domestic and family origins are key to Shields’ process and literary production. Shields articulates a metatextual oeuvre that raises questions for Canadian literature as well as for writing and diversity, particularly for what has been identified as “women’s literature.” This class will examine that rubric but will also examine how her writing models different subversions of realism, postmodernism, mystery, and autobiography.

While no semester-long course can study in depth ALL of her publications, students are encouraged to read Shields' complete *oeuvre*. Our critical analysis will focus on five of the novels, one biography, the short stories, and her collected commentaries on the practice of writing.

Key research questions for this course will include the following: aspects of women's writing in Canada; creative explorations into approaches to narrative; the complications of gendered reading; spatial and place-specific peregrinations; creative and critical cross-fertilization; the friction between the past and the present; writerly engagement with multiple genres; the challenges of evaluating a writer's "completed" work.

Pre-requisite for this course: *6 units of English at the 400 level.*

This class requires steady ongoing reading, handing in assignments during the term, in-person attendance in class (unless ill), and serious focus.

#### \*COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- identify and interpret various literary strategies in the work of a 20<sup>th</sup> century writer;
- demonstrate readerly awareness of the synergy of form and content;
- analyze genre declension in Shields' work;
- critique Shields' deployment of language;
- write a clear literary exegesis on the work under scrutiny;
- apply a honed understanding of how language, image, description, and dialogue work;
- employ critical tools with which to analyze writing and to discuss key issues in the area of communication;
- understand and demonstrate appropriate social conduct and knowledge of cross-cultural differences when reading texts and discussing them in a class context.

#### **Required Texts and readings:**

*Collected Stories*

*Startle and Illuminate: Carol Shields on Writing*

*Jane Austen*

*Larry's Party*

*Swann: A Mystery*

*The Republic of Love*

*The Stone Diaries*

*Unless*

Books are available from the bookstore, physically and virtually.

#### **Learning technology:**

While not required, it will be useful for students to have access to a laptop computer in class. The D2L site for this course contains required readings and other relevant class resources and materials (see [D2L.ucalgary.ca](http://D2L.ucalgary.ca)), and students should expect to rely on D2L to prepare for class.

## **Assignments and Evaluation:**

### Class Participation and Overall Participation

(based on timely submission of assignments, lecture attendance and preparation, bibliographical contributions, discussion and critical acumen in seminars): 10%

Short paper: (5 pages): 20%

Long paper: (10 pages): 30%

Final Paper, which may be a creative response (20 pages): 40%

### **TOTAL 100%**

**\*\*NB** There is NO FINAL EXAM in this class. Students are graded on their papers, their reading, participation, critical acumen, and writing.

**\*\*NB** Students must complete ALL assignments to receive a passing grade. One missing piece will result in a final grade of F.

There will be no assignments given for extra credit.

Detailed records on attendance and in-class contributions will be used in the calculation of the participation mark. Attendance is an aspect of participation

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/e-3.html>

Students are expected to attend regularly and to be fully present and engaged in class activities and discussions. Of course, ill students are asked not to attend, but must ensure that the required work is completed.

### Late Assignments or Absences:

Assignments submitted after the deadline will be penalized with the loss of a third of a grade (for example, an A- to B+) for each business day (not class) that the assignment is overdue.

I am thoroughly annoyed at the use of the word “thing” to stand in for every object, event, emotion, or idea. Use of the word “thing” in your papers will be penalized with the loss of a third of grade (for example, from an A- to a B+). Expand your vocabulary.

All assignments are due to your professor via email, as a doc or docx attachment to Professor van Herk ([vanherk@ucalgary.ca](mailto:vanherk@ucalgary.ca)) by the due date on the Class Schedule with the paper identified as follows: 527, your last name, assignment #.doc. It is your responsibility to keep backup copies of all assignments in case of technical glitch or loss.

### Grading System:

The University of Calgary’s official four-point Grading System, as described in the Calendar will be used in this course. <http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/f-2.html>

A+/A (4.0); A- (3.7); B+ (3.3); B (3.0); B- (2.7); C+ (2.3); C (2.0); C- (1.7); D+ (1.3); D (1.0); F (0)

Your final grade will consist of an evaluation of the work you write, your performance in class, your readerly acumen, and your participation. All written assignments are graded (using the letter system) and returned to you.

Your attendance and engagement are part of your participation grade. You are expected to attend class and to apply our discussion to your papers.

My explanation of grades

A-/A/A+: Exceptional work

B+/B/B-: Good work

C+/C/C-: Average/Satisfactory work

D range: Minimal pass

F: No Credit

Students must reach the minimum percentage threshold for the grade range to receive that letter grade. For example, to receive an A-, a student must have surpassed the minimum threshold of 80.00% in the course.”

Although the A+ is solely an honorific that entails no additional points in the 4-point system, I will employ this mark to distinguish superlative work that exceeds expectations in style, correctness, intellectual depth and breadth, sophistication, and originality.

**Please do not contact me to request an adjustment to your final grade unless (1) you suspect I have made an error, or (2) you are planning to formally appeal your results.**

### **Conduct:**

Students, employees, and academic staff should demonstrate behaviour in class that promotes and maintains a positive and productive learning environment. As members of the University community, students, employees, and academic staff are expected to demonstrate conduct consistent with the University of Calgary Calendar, the Code of Conduct and Non-Academic Misconduct policy and procedures, which can be found at:

<http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/k.html>

### **Food, Drink, Health:**

Because this is an evening course and a long class, it is understandable that students might feel hungry. Students may drink coffee or water or juice in class, but I would request no consumption of food. Eating in a class this small is distracting and intrusive. However, we do have a fifteen-minute break in the middle of the class, so if you have low blood sugar and need to consume something, please do so in the break.

Although masks are not required, those who choose to wear masks are most welcome to do so. Our classroom is small and less well-ventilated than optimal, so I would appreciate the gesture.

### **Classroom Policy on Electronic Devices, Email, and Internet Use:**

You are welcome to use electronic devices in class. However, please use them appropriately: checking social media, sending personal messages, and other online communication unrelated to class distracts you and those around you. Cell phones should be stowed in a pocket/bag during class, unless you are expecting a death-defying call. Should I happen to observe you using a device in a way that contravenes this policy, I will politely remind you of its tenets.

We will be in a wireless-access classroom. You may take notes and work on a laptop in class. If the context is relevant, we may use the Internet to search for a particular item of information together. You are to use this as a tool to accompany the context of what we are learning and discussing. You are NOT to surf the net, text message your friends, play games, or do assignments for a different class.

Please check D2L and email regularly for updates, assignment instructions, and other course-related information. Email is the best way to contact me. Although I do my best to respond promptly, please allow up to 48 hours for a response. I will not summarize class discussion or lectures through email— if you miss class, please gather any missing information from D2L and your fellow students. Email is not a substitute for attending class.

### **How to do well in this course:**

1. Class attendance is required. You will have difficulty passing if you do not attend class, if you do not read the texts in advance (and the reading in this course is heavy), and if you do not engage in discussion of the works.
2. Students who work steadily throughout the term perform better than students who put off assignments. However, if you are ill or are experiencing other difficulties, do let me know so that appropriate accommodation can be made for your circumstances.
3. The assignments you submit to the instructor must be double-spaced, with at least 1-inch margins, and must use a clear font so that it can be read easily. Ensure that your name and your student number is on your paper and that the pages are numbered in sequence. All writing must be submitted to Professor van Herk's email address as a doc or docx attachment.
4. Follow the separate Class Schedule for this class; use it to plan for effective use of your time.
5. Class participation (discussion) is a requirement, part of the graded component of this course.
6. If you are having difficulties of any kind, or if you have questions, please feel free to e-mail me. I am happy to speak with you at a convenient time. Do not hesitate to inform me of potential difficulties because I may be able to help you solve them.

### **Guidelines for in-class discussion:**

Students will be marked for the quality of their engagement with the class, receiving merit for the insightfulness of their observations, critical questions, and the thoughtfulness of their contributions.

From the language that holds sway in daily conversation and from our abbreviated virtual language, a nuanced vocabulary may seem archaic, but is increasingly desirable. The current reliance on “thing,” “stuff,” “you know,” and “like” are especial markers of a lazy tongue. A key objective of this class is a focus on improving your vocabulary and wit by moving beyond such limited vernacular. Please note your oral fixatives and work to enhance your eloquence.

In terms of evaluative positions and their critical expression, your personal tastes are a less useful benchmark than objective appreciation. When reading any text, the questions you must confront are not whether or not you “liked” the material, but how it is developed, with reference to literary elements. Also, learning is about confronting uncomfortable ideas. Shields did not shy away from complex situations, and at some point during this class, we are likely to encounter sensitive material.

### **Amplified description of Assignments:**

Short Paper (1000 words): 20%

This short discussion paper will apprehend and discuss the deployment of place or material detail in any one of Shields’ works.

Long paper (2000 words): 30%

This research paper should examine in detail one of the threads traced throughout and within Shields’ work.

Final Paper, which may be a creative response (4000 words): 40%

You will derive your own topic for the final paper.

Class participation (discussion and preparedness): 10%

Class participation is measured by germane contributions to discussion and to the class bibliography, and each student’s preparedness and engagement with the work, as well as ability to speak eloquently.

**There is no exam in this class.**

**All assignments must be complete for students to pass this course.**

**Academic Integrity:**

This course, like all courses at the University of Calgary, holds students to high standards of honest and responsible scholarship. Please consult the [Academic Integrity website](#) for a detailed description of university policies, which will be enforced in this course. Cases of suspected academic misconduct will be referred to the Associate Dean of Arts for a ruling.

**Plagiarism** is a type of academic misconduct. Plagiarism occurs when a student presents the ideas, expression of ideas, or work of another person as their own. Another equally serious form of plagiarism occurs when a student submits something they have written themselves for credit in two or more courses without first securing written permission from all those course instructors. Consequences for plagiarism include failure on the assignment, failure in the course, and possible suspension or expulsion from the university. Using any source whatsoever without clearly documenting it is a serious academic offense.

**Deferral of term work and final examinations:**

Should you require an extension for completion of term papers or assignments beyond the deadline of five days after the end of lectures, an [Application of Deferment of Term Work](#) must be completed. It is the student's responsibility to initiate this process with the instructor. The University also has regulations governing the [deferral of final examinations](#).

**Grade appeals:**

To pursue a Reassessment of Graded Term Work or a Reappraisal of an Academic Assessment, Consult the [University Calendar](#) and request advice from the English Department at [engl@ucalgary.ca](mailto:engl@ucalgary.ca). Please note that mere dissatisfaction with a grade is not sufficient grounds for an appeal.

**[English Department Website:](#)**

For more information about courses, programs, policies, events, and contacts in the Department of English.

**Scribe and Muse Club for English Students:**

The [Scribe and Muse Reading and Writing Club](#) fosters and champions reading and writing through community service, leadership, and engagement. Our email address is [smecuofc@gmail.com](mailto:smecuofc@gmail.com).

**Writing support:**

[The Student Success Centre](#) offers both online and workshop writing support for U of C students.

**[Academic regulations and schedules](#)****Student Academic Accommodations:**

The Student Accessibility Services website is available [here](#). University accommodation policies can be found at the following links:

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/b-6-1.html>

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/b-6.html>

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/b-6-2.html>

**Program Advising and Student Information Resources** is done through the Faculty of Arts Students' Centre. Office location: SS102; phone: 403-220-3580; email: [ascarts@ucalgary.ca](mailto:ascarts@ucalgary.ca)  
Website: <http://arts.ucalgary.ca/undergraduate>

### **Instructor's Intellectual Property**

Course materials created by instructors, including presentations, posted notes, labs, case studies, assignments, and exams, remain the intellectual property of the instructor. These materials may NOT be reproduced, redistributed or copied without the explicit consent of the instructor. The posting of course materials to third party websites such as note-sharing sites without permission is prohibited. Sharing of extracts of these course materials with other students enrolled in the course at the same time may be allowed under fair dealing.

### **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy**

Student information will be collected in accordance with usual classroom practice. Students' assignments will be accessible only by the authorized course faculty and student colleagues. Private information related to the individual student is treated with the utmost regard by the faculty at the University of Calgary.

### **Sexual violence policy:**

<https://www.ucalgary.ca/policies/files/policies/sexual-violence-policy.pdf>

### **Other important information:**

- [Wellness and Mental Health Resources](#)
- [Student Success](#)
- [Student Ombuds Office](#)
- [Student Union \(SU\) Information](#)
- [Graduate Students' Association \(GSA\) Information](#)
- [Emergency Evacuation/Assembly Points](#)
- [Safewalk](#)

### **Universal Student Ratings of Instruction (USRI):**

Please participate in [USRI Surveys](#) toward the end of the course. The feedback they provide helps us to evaluate teaching, enhance student learning, and guide students as they select courses.

Aritha van Herk  
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