

Carleton University
Fall 2025/Winter 2026 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

ENGL 2200A: Creativity, Imagination, and Writing
Tarot, Literature, and Creative Practice

Prerequisites: second year standing

Instructor: Professor B. Johnson
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***** This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change. A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. *****

COURSE DESCRIPTION

W. B. Yeats, T. S. Eliot, Sylvia Plath, Italo Calvino, Robertson Davies, Samuel R. Delany, Gloria Anzaldúa, Rachel Pollack: these are but a handful of major twentieth-century writers for whom tarot cards functioned as a powerful imaginative stimulus and, just as frequently, a tool of composition or creative process. Taking the current explosion of popular interest in tarot decks, tarot practices, and tarot-themed literature as its starting point, this class introduces students to the history, theory, and practice of using tarot as a tool for creative work. Through a combination of lectures, literary and art-historical study, purposive card-play, in-class writing exercises, and self-directed creative or scholarly writing projects and workshops, we will: (i) explore the visual history of tarot cards and decks; (ii) learn how tarot has been used by poets and prose writers to inform their writing across a range of literary and popular genres; (iii) engage in scholarly research on tarot and tarot-inspired literature; (iv) collaborate on making a useable 30-card class deck; and (v) experiment with techniques for using cards and decks within our own writing practices. At the end of the term, students will (vi) showcase a selection of their work—both critical and creative—in a tarot literary zine that we create together.

This course is open to all general BA and Hons students with second year standing, no previous experience with creative writing required. Students will have the option of being evaluated on the basis of traditional scholarly work (literary analysis, short essays) or creative writing assignments (poetry, fiction, life-writing)—or some combination of both.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will develop skills in literary and cultural analysis, with an emphasis on the elements of narrative, poetic form, and methods of storytelling. They will work with both primary texts and secondary materials to interpret fiction, poetry, images, and material culture. All students will gain experience in oral presentation, sharing and discussing their writing (scholarly or creative), giving and receiving peer feedback in a workshop setting, and revising their writing in light of feedback. They will complete the course with two pieces of polished writing (either short

scholarly articles or creative manuscripts or some combination of these), as well as a toolkit of new process-techniques for creative development and early drafts of material for writing projects and scholarship beyond the course. They will collaborate in the production of a tarot deck and zine.

PRIMARY TEXTS

Samuel Delany, *Nova*

Italo Calvino, *The Castle of Crossed Destinies*

...plus

any tarot deck (cut-out Rider-Waite-Smith deck provided, but work with any deck you wish)

selected tarot decks (viewable online or I will bring them to class)

selected short stories (on Brightspace)

selected poetry (on Brightspace)

EVALUATION

5% Short Presentation on a Tarot Card

20% In-Class Writing Journal (Scholarly or Creative; best 10 of 12 entries)

- most weeks, students will choose between scholarly or creative in-class writing assignments; they are free to focus entirely on creative prompts or entirely on scholarly prompts, or to alternate between them as they see fit

20% Assignment 1: Short Project (Workshopped, Scholarly or Creative)

- students in either stream will have a choice of topics: A, B, C, or D (each topic is a development of an In-Class Writing Journal Activity)

30% Assignment 2: Longer Project (Workshopped, Scholarly or Creative)

- students wishing to do a creative writing topic will devise a project topic based on one of the In-Class Writing Activities; this topic must be approved in advance by the professor
- students wishing to do a scholarly project will sign-up to present a 20-minute short fiction seminar (10%) and will then have the choice of either developing that seminar into a formal paper and process reflection (20%) OR doing an all new Short Project on a topic they devise based on one of the In-Class Writing Activities; this topic must be approved in advance by the professor

20% Workshop Participation (Scholarly and Creative)

5% Zine Workshops and Pages