

HL 2020 Creative Writing Workshop - Working with words

Division of English, Nanyang Technological University

Semester 2, AY 2016/2017

Day: TBA

Time: TBA

Location: TBA

Seminar Leader: Marina Lewycka

Contact Details: TBA

Office: TBA

*It's none of their business that you have to learn to write. Let them think you were born that way.
- Ernest Hemingway*

Through the ages, most people have learnt to write by trial and error, and by imitating other writers whom they admire. Learning to write is a life-long process, and no one can ever say they have nothing more to learn. Whether you have already started writing or are still exploring the writer's craft, this course will help you to develop. We will look at the work of other writers, including other students in the seminar, and analyse the choices they make at every stage of a piece of work. There are no rights and wrongs, but you can reach your own conclusions about what is an effective way to engage and hold your reader's interest and sympathy. You will also have the opportunity to share your own work with others in a non-competitive and supportive environment. A creative writing course like this one can't teach you to be a genius, but we can help you to channel your 99% perspiration more effectively by introducing you to some of the approaches, techniques and strategies that successful writers use. We will focus mainly on the novel but students who have a particular interest in another genre will have the opportunity to research, introduce and submit writing on a topic or in a genre that is of special interest to them.

Students should read widely in the genre in which they wish to write, and should keep notes

REQUIRED TEXTS:

JM Coetzee *Waiting for the Barbarians*
Margaret Atwood *The Blind Assassin*

In addition, please read and study at least one other book of your own choice, with particular reference to the topics listed on the next page.

SEMINAR STRUCTURE

The workshop will meet once a week, for three hours, and will divide into two parts, with a break in the middle.

PART ONE

The first half of the session will be a workshop concerned with the 'nuts and bolts' of writing, and each week one or two students will be invited to sign up for and present a topic from the list; this will count towards your final assessment.

In addition, every student will be expected to bring along one or two brief examples of the topic under discussion each week, either that they have written themselves, or that they particularly admire, which they can share with the group. (For example if we are discussing openings, bring along your favourite opening)

PART TWO

The second half of the seminar will be 'critique' sessions, spent mainly considering in depth the creative work of two or three individual students. Please sign up for two sessions during the semester and prepare a passage of 300-800 words of your own work to share with the group. This may be a stand-alone piece, or a part of a longer work. You must circulate this at least three days in advance. Each student should sign up for two 'critique' sessions (if you want to present poetry, the poem may be of any length, but must be accompanied by a commentary up to the prescribed total). Remember, this is not a competition or an assassination exercise. We are here to help each other.

Weekly Topics

Week 1) Introductions . Why do stories matter?

Week 2) What makes a good plot?

Week 3) What makes a good opening?

Week 4) What are the uses of dialogue in fiction? What makes good dialogue?

Week 5) What makes us believe in a character? Heroes, villains and 'ordinary' people.

Week 6) What is narrative voice, and why is it important to choose the right one for your story?

Week 7) What do we mean by 'point of view'? Why is it important in fiction?

RECESS WEEK

Week 8) Setting the scene. Descriptions of places.

Week 9) What makes a good ending?

Week 10) What makes a good writing style? Examples of good and bad style.

Topic 11) What makes us laugh? How and why to write comedy.

Topic 12) What kind of poetry is important in the modern world?

Topic 13) How to structure a film script or a stage drama

Topic 14) News journalism and opinion pieces

Topic 15) Memoir, history and fiction; what are the similarities and the differences?

Topic 16) What makes a great short story?

(Please sign your name against a topic/week you wish to present. You can sign up for a topic that one other person has chosen – but not more than two students per topic please – except topics 11-16. If you are particularly interested in one of these genres, we will make seminar time available by grouping together less popular topics. At the end of your session, please hand in a written transcript of your presentation. This will count towards 30% of your assessment.)

SEMINAR NOTES:

- Please be present, please have your writing and reading done, and please be on time. If you are more than 20 minutes late to class it will count as an absence.
- Please no side conversations.
- Computers are fine but please no texting or other digital distractions.
- Let me know as soon as possible if you have any disability or other issue that requires special accommodation in class. (Examples: you need to sit in a special position so you can see or hear well; you need to leave your phone on in case of a family emergency; you need to leave class early to attend a medical appointment, etc.)
- Any writing that is not your own should be in quotation marks, unless everyone will recognize that it's by somebody else (even if they don't remember whom it's by), e.g. "The best laid plans of mice and men." Please make sure you are familiar with the NTU plagiarism guidelines.

ASSESSMENT

All students will be assessed as follows:

- 1) A sustained piece of creative writing of 1,500 to 2,500 words in total, which could be a short story, chapter from a novel (with synopsis) or memoir, journalism, script, poem (with commentary.) Some or all of this should already have been presented for critique in seminars. 50%
- 2) A workshop presentations of about 10 mins (800 to 1,800 words) on a topic of choice from the list, to be written up and submitted for assessment 30%
- 3) Participation in discussion; contribution of examples to topic under discussion, helpfulness in critiquing other students' work. 20%

ASSESSMENT NOTES:

- Please contact me immediately if you think you will have difficulty completing any of the requirements or submitting your work on time. Extensions are only granted in exceptional circumstances (for example, for medical reasons or in cases of family emergency), and documentation is required. However, support or resources may also be available to help you manage more minor difficulties, so please don't hesitate to contact me for an appointment to discuss anything that comes up.
- Please include the grading sheet from your syllabus with each submission.
- Assignments should be printed in a plain, legible 12-point font, either Times New Roman or Arial or similar. Double-spaced and page numbered.
- Assignments should be stapled. Please DO NOT submit your work in files or folders.
- Assignments will be submitted in class.

We will discuss workshop practice, critiquing other people's work, submission and feedback guidelines in the first seminar.

Course Outline I will provide a weekly course outline once students have chosen their topics.

*NB. Topics and readings are subject to change depending on our interests and the speed of our progress.