Writing London: Outsiders

The outsider is the hero, the man/woman who has the power to see, save and transform the society from which he/she remains separate. This creative spirit is one that abounds in artists, giants of sport, science and business. The outsider is also the loser, the man/woman who sees society best but either refuses to or cannot save it or indeed, him/herself.

This writing course will look at both aspects of the outsider in myth and great literature, all the while using London as our sensory playground.

Like all craftspeople, we will learn by attending to and emulating great work. Students’ final submission can be either a fiction piece or a piece of creative non-fiction

What you will learn:

1. Why and how myth is at the heart of storytelling
2. The value of symbols
3. How to work in diffuse thinking (intuitive) mode and how and when to switch to rational thinking mode
4. How to analyse texts as a would be writer: looking for dramatic turns, examining motivation, contradictions, and of course, how writers use/play with language
5. How to remember better by visualising and recalling what you learn
6. And, of course, how to write better

You may be:

1. Someone who wants to learn/extend their practice of the craft of writing
2. A literature major who wants to enhance his/her analytical skills of literary texts
3. Someone who wants to write more felt/dramatic/structured academic writing assignments (all writers- fictional, factual, academic, bloggers- use the same tool box)
4. A Business major who understands that creating/building a business is also about telling good stories; someone who is interested in better understanding what motivates people or someone who wants to learn maverick mode thinking, what it is and how to do it

Our work
Have a listen to our work:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a4xjgw2Tz4M

and

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q21bYdggzDDQ
Course outline

Week 1

Introduction

What we are doing and why: Myths, fairy-stories and legitimate stealing. Simple heroes and complex losers or complex heroes and simple losers? Themes, structure, questions

Required reading: The narrative of the cave in Plato’s ‘The Republic’

Week 2

Curioser and curioser

Recap and recall

Introduction to diffuse/creative thinking. First steps.

Analysing the story of the cave as a creation myth, a political myth and a religious myth. Examining Plato’s use of symbols

Class trip: in the week. ‘Wonderland’ at the National Theatre.

Required reading: The first chapter of Colin Wilson’s ‘The outsider’

Week 3

Outsider thinking. Refusing to get into the box

Recap and recall

Introduction to the Pomodore technique, or writing to the command of a chicken egg timer.

Analysis of Wilson’s chapter and ‘Wonderland’

Week 4

Following the trail

Class trip: London walk and visit to the Dennis Severs’ House

http://www.dennissevershouse.co.uk/booking-and-visiting/private-group-visits/

Where you go round a Georgian house where the inhabitant seem to have gone out moments before you enter each room. Who are/were these unknown people?
**Week 5**

**Surface and interior lives**

Recap and recall

Analysis of the class trip. In creating a story, a life, where to begin: with a sensory impulse or research? Looking at entries and exits.

Examination of key ideas in Joseph Campbell’s ‘The hero with a thousand faces’ and introduction to his model story structure.

Class reading: Analysis of Sarah and Hagar’s story in the Bible.

**Week 6**

**The big screen**

Class trip: Cinema

Required reading: D.H. Lawrence’s short story ‘Love in the haystacks’

Writing assignment: Re-work a myth or story from a religious text

**Week 7**

**Joined to the world by love**

Recap and recall

Analysis of ‘Love in the Haystacks’.

The outsider as a breaker of moulds: Richard Branson Ted Talk: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufPweb-mO70](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufPweb-mO70)

Sharing our work.

Required reading: Martin McDonagh’s ‘Pillowman’. McDonagh also wrote the film, ‘In Bruges’: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoE9edjEDCI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KoE9edjEDCI)

**Week 8**

**A darker stranger love**
Recap and recall

Analysis of McDonagh’s play.

Class writing exercise: Off the page with Tarot cards

Week 9

Class test

Week 10

Wind up toys and other addictions

Class trip: The Viktor Wynd Museum - it's all about Victorian curiosities, strange hobbies/collections and other weird stuff

And the Museum of Innocence at Somerset House

https://www.somersethouse.org.uk/visual-arts/museum-of-innocence

Required reading: ‘Othello’

Week 11

Lego blocks

Recap and recall

Analysis of the class trip.

Analysis of outsider themes in ‘Othello’. On the surface, an outsider because of his colour, but a greater outsider because of his heroic and poetic capability. Iago, the man of negative capability, an outsider too. ‘True’ men and ‘true’ women. How to go against type.

In-class writing exercise: The use of props to build your people

Required reading: A Robert Walser short story

Week 11

The softest of embellishments

Analysis of the Walser short story.
In-class reading: A Ted Hughes’ poem with either a Densie Levertov or Stevie Smith poem

One to ones with students to discuss their final submissions

Week 13

Practice run

Reading our final work

Class trip in the week: Visit to the National or portrait gallery and tea at the crypt

Week 14

To posterity and beyond

Recording our podcast

Use of non-material texts:
By all means, read books/texts online and bring in your laptops and other devices to class.

Grade breakdown

Students need not be literature students but they should have a yen for writing or a strong desire to try. You are encouraged to submit a piece of work- however long or short - every week. This will be read and commented upon but not be graded.

But because this course begins with the premise that you must know in order to do, there will be a test on the texts we are studying.

- This will be on the thematic issues we have discussed and will be worth 20% of the final grade
- A final essay of 2,500 + words will make up the remaining 80%. This will be due in before the week 13 class in order to give me time to edit the stories for publication.