

Tallinn Summer School Creative Writing Course 2024

The programme may be subject to minor changes.

Creative Writing in English 29 July – 3 August 2024

Title: CRAFT AND TECHNIQUE: SHAPING A POEM

Tutor: Leontia Flynn, poet and Professor at the Seamus Heaney Centre, Queen's University, Belfast

COURSE SCHEDULE

Monday 29 July DAY ONE: THINKING/FEELING/LOOKING

'There is the inner life, which is the world of final reality, the world of memory, emotion, imagination, intelligence, and natural common sense, and which goes on all the time, consciously or unconsciously, like the heartbeat. There is also the thinking process by which we break into that inner life and capture answers and evidence to support the answers out of it. That process of raid, or persuasion, or ambush, or dogged hunting, or surrender is the kind of thinking we have to learn and if we do not somehow learn it, then our minds lie in us like the fish in the pond of a man who cannot fish'.

Ted Hughes, 'Learning to Think', *Poetry in the Making* (Faber, 1967).

- Paying attention. Learning to create space for your poems by noticing and carefully developing your thoughts.
- Description. Describing your subject carefully using precise language. Building up detailed images.
- Looking. Applying these principles to a specific object or painting. Understanding and attempting ekphrasis in poetry.
- Avoiding waffle, vagueness or bullshit.

Tuesday 30 July DAY TWO: SOUND AND SENSE

'The figure a poem makes. It begins in delight and ends in wisdom. The figure is the same as for love. No one can really hold that the ecstasy should be static and stand still in one place. It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life – not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion.'

Robert Frost, 'The Figure a Poem Makes', 1939

- Creating movement or ‘flow’ in poetry. Understanding how different line lengths control the pace, speed and meaning of the poem.
- Developing the poem using the right kind of expression. Saying things simply and allowing a poem to unfold.
- Looking at the importance of beginnings, surprises and endings in your poem.

Wednesday 31 July DAY THREE: SHAPES

‘A poem is just a little machine for remembering itself...’ Don Paterson

- Paying attention to different stanza shapes in poetry. Noticing how stanzas organise the sense and ‘argument’ of a poem.
- Understanding the effects created by stanzas of different lengths and sizes. Looking at unrhymed stanzas as well as learning to use rhythm and rhyme to build up a stanza.
- Focussing on the sonnet as a ‘verbal machine’ and understanding octave, sestet and volta.
- Organising a poem in the sonnet shape.

Thursday 1 August DAY FOUR: SET FORMS

‘Form is a straitjacket in the way that a straitjacket was a straitjacket for Houdini.’
Paul Muldoon, *The Irish Times*, April 19, 2003.

- Developing an understanding of specific poetic set forms. Reproducing the patterns and mechanics of villanelles, pantoums and ghazals.
- Looking at the effects of constraints, including line length and deliberate repetition.
- Thinking about what subjects or kinds of poems might suit these forms. Thinking about how their rules might be broken or bent, as well as followed.
- Learning how using poetic constraints can take your poems in unexpected and liberating directions.

Friday 2 August DAY FIVE: EXPERIMENTS

“Most reckless things are beautiful in some way, and recklessness is what makes experimental art beautiful, just as religions are beautiful because of the strong possibilities that they are founded on nothing.”

John Ashbery

- Continuing experiments with set form by analysing sestinas. Understanding this elaborate poetic form, and making your own attempts at it.
- Looking at other poetic forms which are arbitrary, mathematical or just perverse.

- Learning how these elaborate rules can liberate your poem from what you were trying to say to what the poem wants to do. Learning how to take risks with your poems.

Saturday 3 August DAY SIX: PRESENTATIONS

The final day of the workshop will focus on the body of work built up over the course of the summer school, and on how to present the finished product. Each participant will read a selected poem of their own, as we look back at what we've learned during the week. The poetry reading will take place as part of a summer school showcase and celebration.

DAILY SCHEDULE

From day two the course will follow the schedule below. On day one, the 9.00-10.30 session will also be a seminar.

- 9.00 – 10.30 workshop
- coffee break
- 10.45 - 12.15 seminar session 1
- lunch break
- 13.00 - 13.45 seminar session 2