



THE SWEDISH PROGRAM

LIBERAL ARTS @ STOCKHOLM SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

Course title: Writing Sweden
SSE Course number 184
Instructor: Dr. Thomas Lavelle

First and foremost, this course creates a space for students to engage creatively with Stockholm, Sweden, Europe as place—an engagement that offers scope for transnational, transcultural and even translanguaging learning. What structures this space and creates achievable learning outcomes is a series of disciplinary inputs and practices drawn primarily from creative writing, from literary studies and from writing studies. Students who complete the course successfully will have given voice to their engagement with Sweden through a number of forms and genre. They will have explored intensively the relationships among engaged experience, reflection and textual artifacts. They will have also triangulated their own creative response to place with the responses of other writers in similar situations, both well-known authors and classmates.

More specifically, the pedagogy and practices of successful creative writing courses provide the foundation for reaching these outcomes. This begins with exploration and explanation of the continuum that ranges from wholly expressive voices through to fully rhetorical voices, from private to public exigencies. As with traditional creative writing pedagogy, students study exemplars of established genre, in this case poetry, short fiction and creative non-fiction. The course also shares with traditional creative writing pedagogy an essential reliance on workshop methodology through which students not only learn to read critically and respond sensitively, but also grow familiar with bringing their work into public arenas and learn to learn from their peers.

What moves the course beyond the ambitions of most second and third year creative writing courses is its thematic specificity, a theme we can call the poetics of place. This poetics is embodied in a great deal of literature, from Fogelström, Jewett and Cather through Toomer and Frost to Erdrich and Danticat. Writing of this kind requires a strong engagement with a place and an active struggle to understand, describe, or explain it. Perhaps most of all a poetics of place requires a specificity, a groundedness in particulars that foreground things local in a writer's portrayal of life in a place. The writers mentioned above wrote familiar places; others, Bolaño, Tranströmer and Lee for instance, wrote about unfamiliar places. In writing Sweden and Stockholm students may see and engage a life familiar, but they will certainly also write to what is new, unfamiliar, puzzling about this city and country.

Grading

The course employs a traditional A-F grading scale. As is customary in writing courses, it makes use of continuous assessment with no mid-term or final exams. Students receive regular feedback on their performance, and final grades are computed on the basis of the following

weighting:

- Timely and engaged submission of written deliverables: 20%
- A reflective essay on one's progress through mid-term, drawing on personal development as a writer, workshop experience and inspiration texts (due in advance of mid-term tutorials): 15%
- Presentation on poetics of place in short fiction 15%
- Class and workshop participation: 20%
- Writing Sweden portfolio: 30%

Tentative Course outline

T Jan 23

Course introduction (requirements, expectations, personal introductions, questions about the syllabus); the poetics of place, an introduction

Preparation: Read Course syllabus; Earle, "This City"; Mitchell, "Furry Sings the Blues"; Rhys, "I Used to Live Here Once"

Th Jan 25

Journal writing: discussion will center on the readings and on your experience of polishing your journal entries

Preparation: Journal excerpts: Gallant, "The Hunger Diaries"; Woolf, "Moments of Being"; Thoreau; write and bring to class a *polished* journal entry (200-300 words) that focuses on one specific place. This entry can be descriptive, analytical or evaluative; avoid in this instance writing something comparative.

T Jan 30

From journal to artifact: on the basis of your own reading notes and journals, we will discuss what kinds of work Gallant did in order to create "When we were Nearly Young" from the raw material of her journal entries.

Preparation: Read Gallant, "When we were Nearly Young". In reading (and in your reading journals) trace elements from "The Hunger Diaries" that remain constant as they migrate into the short story; similarly, find elements that are not included in the short story, and finally, identify elements that are created wholly new for the work of fiction.

Th Feb 1

Writing place in poetry: discussion will center on these text for the next two lessons; in-class writing exercise

Preparation: Read these inspiration texts: Turner, "HWY 1"; Ortiz Cofer, "The Latin Deli"; C.K. Williams, "Hog"; Espada, "Latin Night at the Pawnshop"; Tay, "The Mental Life of Cities I" and "vii"; Paley, "On Mother's Day"; Tranströmer, "November in the Former DDR"; Paschen, "The Tree Agreement"; Hazard, "Whiskey in Whiting, Indiana" and "A Girl from Connecticut Visited Whiting, Indiana"; Updike, "Goodbye, Göteborg"

T Feb 6

Writing place in poetry: discussion of inspiration texts continues; we will also use our class time to talk about your submissions, for instance, your intent with the piece, your types of inspiration, your decisions about form.

Submission: A poem or poems about a place in Sweden. Here I will not give you any directives about length or form.

Th Feb 8

Poetry workshop 1

Preparation: Read for background Oates, "The Practice of Writing—The Writing Workshop", but especially prepare to discuss in workshop format your classmates' submission. I'll lead the discussion, but everyone including the writer in focus will have a role in advancing our work. Specific texts will be assigned a specific day. If time permits we'll examine additional poems in class relevant to the day's submissions.

T Feb 13

Poetry workshop 2

Preparation: prepare to discuss in workshop format your classmates' submission. I'll lead the discussion, but everyone including the writer in focus will have a role in advancing our work. Specific texts will be assigned a specific day. If time permits we'll examine additional poems in class relevant to the day's submissions.

Th Feb 15

Writing place in creative nonfiction

Preparation: Read Jamaica Kincaid, *A Small Place*; submit a short piece of non-fiction (600-1000) words in which you either enter into a dialogue with Kincaid about one of the chapters of *A Small Place* and how that chapter helps you to understand a place that is important to you or in which you attempt to write about a place that is important to you in a way that is more or less directly inspired by Kincaid's voice or voices.

T Feb 20

Writing place in creative nonfiction: short workshop session on Kincaid pieces and discussion of inspiration texts

Preparation: Read Heller, "Imagining a Cashless World"; Batuman, "The Headscarf, Modern Turkey and me"; Franzen, "The End of the End of the World".

Th Feb 22

Writing place in creative nonfiction: continued discussion of inspiration texts

Preparation: Submit a piece of creative nonfiction that engages place (as in insider like Kincaid, as an investigator like Heller or as a traveler like Whitehead and Franzen).

T Feb 27

Creative nonfiction workshop 1. One student will be assigned to lead the discussion of each piece workshopped.

Th Mar 1

Creative nonfiction workshop 2. One student will be assigned to lead the discussion of each piece workshopped.

Submit mid-term reflective essay (1,000 – 1,500 words in length; secondary reading is permitted, but neither required nor encouraged. Traditional expectations of academic integrity apply).

Mar 6

Mid-term tutorials this week; schedule to circulate.

Writing place in short fiction: discussion of inspiration pieces based on student presentations

Preparation: Read Hemingway, "A Clean Well-Lighted Place"; Lee, "Brothers and Sisters around the World"; Bolaño, "Gomez Palacio"; Woolf, "Kew Gardens"; Moore, "Dance in America"; Townsend Warner, "The Children's Grandmother", Carver, "Chef's House"; student presentations on the poetics of place in short fiction.

Th Mar 8

Writing place in short fiction: discussion of inspiration pieces based on student presentations

Preparation: Read Hemingway, "A Clean Well-Lighted Place"; Lee, "Brothers and Sisters around the World"; Bolaño, "Gomez Palacio"; Woolf, "Kew Gardens"; Moore, "Dance in America"; Townsend Warner, "The Children's Grandmother", Carver, "Chef's House"; student presentations on the poetics of place in short fiction.

T Mar 13

Class replace by mid-term tutorials.

Th Mar 16

Class to be rescheduled.

April 10

Writing place in short fiction:

Preparation: Bring to class and prepare to discuss scenarios for your short stories (a single page sketch or outline).

April 12

From short fiction to flash fiction

Preparation: Read Bierce, "The Failure of Hope and Wandel"; Chopin, "Dr. Chevalier's Lie"; Edney, "Door Frames"; De Búrca, "The Chocolate Song"; Hemingway, "On the Quai at Smyrna".

T April 17

Fiction workshop 1

Individual readers will be assigned to lead the discussion of specific pieces.

Th April 19

Fiction workshop 2

Individual readers will be assigned to lead the discussion of specific pieces.

T Apr 24

Revision in theory and practice

Preparation: Read Oates, "The Art and Craft of Revision" excerpts from Bell, *The Artful Edit*; bring along a piece that you have workshopped and subsequently edited (poem, non-fiction or story—although your fiction pieces may still be a little fresh to benefit fully from this kind of revision)

T Apr 11

Revision and submission

Preparation: Find an on-line literary publication that seems to have an aesthetic or a vision that is compatible with the work you've done on writing Sweden so far. You can start your search with http://www.pw.org/literary_magazines. Class time will be devoted to discussing your selections and your reasons for making them; this will include a discussion of at least one published piece that you feel demonstrates that compatibility. In some cases, we will also discuss how a writer might revise to enhance that compatibility even further.

Apr 26

Writers as performers

This is a workshop/rehearsal to prepare material for your reading. If time allows, we will also watch or listen to some recordings of accomplished readers employing different reading styles.

May 2

Portfolio submission

In addition to our regular lesson, we will also host a public reading on a date to be specified, probably from around 6 p.m. – 8:30 p.m.; you may invite guests. Coordinate with the Swedish Program office.