Preliminary Syllabus
NVL 22 W
The Novel Hatchery: Moving from Idea to the Page

Quarter: Spring 2017

Instructor: Stacey Swann

This online course is designed to inject momentum and direction into the huge task of writing a novel. Some of you may have an idea burning for expansion but are not sure where to begin. Others of you may have begun a project but have found it difficult to move forward. We’ll start at the beginning, looking to ourselves and our experiences as the source of the work to come. We will then explore the foundations of our books: characters and outlines. In later weeks, we’ll take detailed looks at the craft aspects most important to early drafting: theme, setting, stakes, and point of view. Both before and during our workshop section, we’ll dive deep into the topic of first scenes and first chapters, ensuring that your novel opening has set the stage for the work to come.

This course relies on a workshop format. Staring in Week Seven, we’ll be reading and providing feedback on everyone’s novel openings (up to 5000 words). In earlier weeks, you’ll be posting short exercises geared to help you expand your novel into new and fruitful areas. For the exercises, we will be giving short responses. When we begin workshopping your longer excerpts in the second half of the class, the responses should be longer and more detailed. Workshops provide valuable insight for writers, and not just because of the specific feedback on your own stories. In thoughtful examinations of other's work, our own particular weaknesses and challenges become clearer to us. You’ll leave the course with a completed novel opening as well as valuable feedback to help guide your coming draft.

For this class, I have selected two novels to study for overall structure and effectiveness: the “literary” How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia by Mohsin Hamid and The Rosie Project by Graeme Simsion, a more mainstream book. We’ll also use the craft book Is Life Like This? A Guide to Writing Your First Novel in Six Months by John Dufresne to guide us through the preliminary stages of novel writing.

Requirements for a Letter Grade and/or Credit:
For those of you who are taking this course for a grade, the breakdown is as follows. Please note that you can change your grading status at any point before the final class meeting (Friday of the last week of class) by contacting Stanford Continuing Studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forum Participation</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Forum Participation includes workshop comments)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly Writing Exercises</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<td>Workshop Piece</td>
<td>30%</td>
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In keeping with the spirit of this class, grade evaluation is based off of effort and class engagement. For students taking the course CR/NC, you must make a D (65) or better to receive credit.

**Week One: Introductions and Story Germs**

Reading Assignment:
- *Is Life Like This?:* “Introduction,” “A Modest Proposal,” and “In the Beginning”

Writing Assignment:
- “From Germ to your Page One” Exercise

**Week Two: Our Novels, Ourselves**

Reading Assignment:
- *Is Life Like This?:* “Weeks 1 & 2: This Is No Memoir; This Really Happened”
- *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia:* Chapters 1-3

Writing Assignment:
- Craft a scene for your novel that adapts your own memories and emotions into fictional fodder. Pick one of these four: Sense Memory Exercise, Lost Objects Exercise, Phobia Exercise, or Morality Play Exercise (300-600 words)

**Week Three: Characters are People Too**

Reading Assignment:
- *Is Life Like This?:* “Weeks 3 & 4: Desperate People; Desperate Measures”
- *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia:* Chapters 4-6

Writing Assignment:
- “From Acquaintance to Intimate Friend” Exercise (200-500 words)

**Week Four: Your First Scene**

Reading Assignment:
- *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia:* Chapters 7-9

Writing Assignment:
- A Taste of Workshopping: Scene One (500-1200 words)

**Week Five: The Pros and Cons of Outlining**

Reading Assignment:
- *Is Life Like This?:* “Four Gates into the City”
- *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia:* Chapters 10-12

Writing Assignment:
- Create a working outline of your novel or try your hand at an “example” outline using Dufresne’s PLOTTOMATIC! (400 words max)

**Week Six: Further into Chapter One and Stakes (Workshop Begins!)**

Reading Assignment:
- *The Rosie Project:* Chapters 1-9

Writing Assignment:
- “Escalating Stakes” Exercise (200-500 words) (During workshop weeks, the writing assignments will be optional.)
Week Seven: Exploring Your Novel’s World (Workshopping Continues)

Reading Assignment:
- *Is Life Like This?*: “Week 5: Give Me a Place to Stand On”
- *The Rosie Project*: Chapters 10-17
- Workshop pieces (Students might be split into two groups to keep reading amount manageable, dependent on class size.)

Writing Assignment (Optional):
- “Mapping Your Character’s World” Exercise (200-500 words) (During workshop weeks, the writing assignments will be optional.)

Week Eight: The Heart of Your Novel (Workshopping Continues)

Reading Assignment:
- *Is Life Like This?*: “Week 6: What About What It’s About?”
- *The Rosie Project*: Chapters 18-27
- Workshop pieces

Writing Assignment (Optional):
- Letter Exercise: Using either your own point of view or that of your protagonist, write a letter exploring the big issues that your novel is tackling and why they are important (150-300 words). (During workshop weeks, the writing assignments will be optional.)

Week Nine: Picking Point of View (Workshopping Continues)

Reading Assignment:
- *Is Life Like This?*: “Week 7: What’s That Voice I Hear?”
- *The Rosie Project*: Chapters 28-36
- Workshop pieces

Writing Assignment (Optional):
- “Exploring Point of View Options” Exercise: Rewrite your first 100 words of your novel in two different points of view. (During workshop weeks, the writing assignments will be optional.)

Week Ten: Preparing to Launch: From Beginning to Middle to End

- *Is Life Like This?*: “Noveldom”

Writing Assignment:
- Craft a blueprint for completing your first draft. What is your schedule for the coming months? (200-500 words)

Our Weekly Schedule:
MONDAY: I will send out an email to the class introducing the week and directing you to the new Forum threads, including your Discussion Points about the week's readings and your weekly writing exercises. I will create the Forum threads where you will turn in your exercises, but you won't actually post them there yourselves until Wednesday.

WEDNESDAY: You should post your weekly writing assignment by Wednesday at 5pm (Pacific Time), although you may do so as early as you are ready.
THURSDAY-FRIDAY: By Friday at 5pm, please post your workshop responses and answers to the weekly discussion questions. But again, I encourage you to join in these "conversations" throughout the week.

THURSDAY: I will hold a weekly video chat for our classroom either on Thursdays (exact time to be determined). You're not required to come every week, and feel free to drop in for shorter periods of time within that hour.

A Final Note:
Although most students take online courses with the absolute intention of doing every single assignment, "real life"—family, illness, professional obligations, etc.—often has a way of making that impossible. Sometimes, the frustration this causes prompts students to drop completely out of the class. Rather than adopting an "all-or-nothing" approach to your participation in this course, I recommend simply doing what you can, when you can. If there are a couple of weeks in which you don't get to the reading, that's no problem. If you have to skip a couple exercises, this is also okay. As long as you're continuing to comment on your classmates' submissions, you'll be fine. And remember, if you DO have to take a couple of weeks completely away from the class, you can always come back! "The door is always open," as they say.