

Course sample

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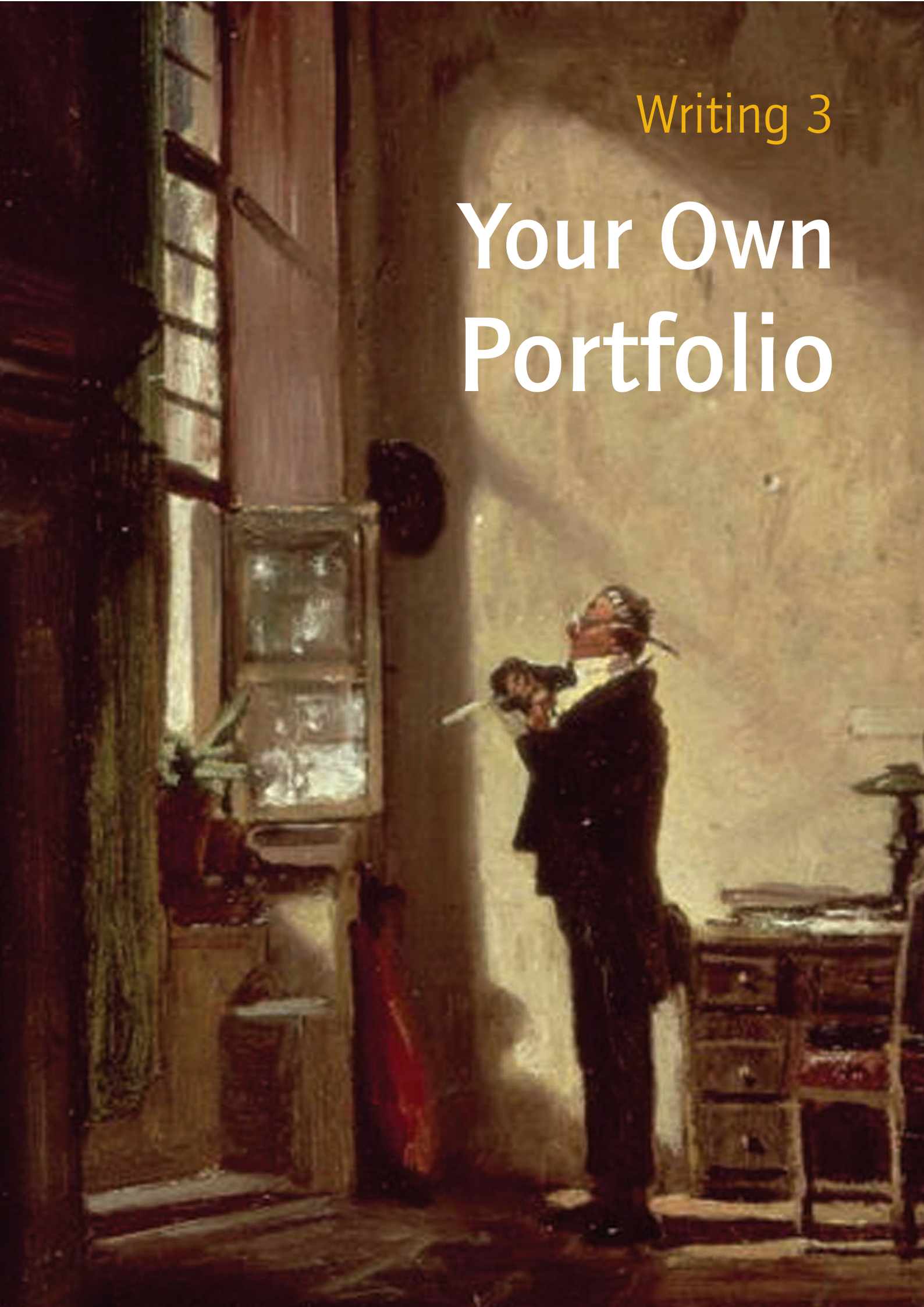
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Writing 3

Your Own Portfolio



Level HE6 – 60 CATS

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Front cover
The Writer Karl Spitzweg

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Before you start

Welcome to *Writing 3: Your Own Portfolio*. Your OCA **Student handbook** should be able to answer most questions about this and all other OCA courses, so keep it to hand as you work through this course.

Course aims

This course is designed to enable you to build on your study at previous levels, improve the quality of your writing and further develop your personal writing style. In consultation with your tutor, you'll plan and complete a personal programme of work, including a major project (at least ten short stories or a series of 30 poems) developing a particular theme or idea. You'll explore in greater detail the craft of writing and research a contemporary literary movement, writer or work.

Note that this course is not designed to provide direct help with getting work into print. However, your tutor may encourage you to seek publication if your work reaches an appropriate level.

Course outcomes

On successful completion of the course you will be able to:

- demonstrate the ability to communicate a wide range of experience through creative prose or poetry, with supporting written research
- express your ideas in a creative, sustained and stylistically aware piece or collection of writings
- explain the theories and concepts underlying the writing you've chosen to do and write making innovative use of means of expression and structure
- participate in the direction and design of your own learning experience
- critically review a contemporary work, movement or writer.

Your tutor

Your tutor is your main point of contact with OCA. Before you start work, make sure that you're clear about your tuition arrangements. The OCA system is explained in some detail in your **Student handbook**.

If you haven't already done so, please write a paragraph or two about your experience to date. Add background information about anything that you think may be relevant for your tutor to know about you (your profile) – for example your experience of writing so far, your reasons for starting this course and what you hope to achieve from it.

Email or post your profile to your tutor as soon as possible. This will help him or her to understand how best to support you during the course.

Arrange with your tutor how you'll deal with any queries that arise between assignments. This will usually be by email or phone.

It will be helpful for your tutor to see some of the work that you produce in between assignments. For example, you could scan pages of your learning log and email them to your tutor. Or you could post your learning log as an online blog in the OCA website so that your tutor can see how your work is developing. It's particularly important that your tutor sees regular evidence of your development if you're planning to have your work on this course formally assessed.

Make sure that you label any work that you send to your tutor with your name, student number and the assignment number. Your tutor will get back to you as soon as possible after receiving your assignment but this may take a little time. Continue with the course while you're waiting.

Formal assessment

Read the section on assessment in your **Student handbook** at an early stage in the course. Your **Assessment and how to get qualified** study guide gives more detailed information about assessment and accreditation. For assessment you'll need to submit a cross-section of the work you've done on the course:

- three course assignments of your choice
- your critical review (2,500–3,000 words) of a contemporary work, movement or writer
- your reflective commentary on the course as a whole (1,500 – 2,000 words)
- your tutor report forms.

The critical review accounts for 10% of your final mark if you decide to have your work on this course formally assessed.

Only work done during the course should be submitted to your tutor or for formal assessment.

Your learning log

Your learning log is an integral part of this and every other OCA course. If you're new to OCA courses, read your **Keeping sketchbooks and learning logs** study guide for further information.

Use your learning log to record your progress through the course. Your learning log should contain:

- your preliminary drafts
- your thoughts on the work you produce for each exercise
- your ideas and observations as you work through the course
- your reflections on the reading you do and any research you carry out
- your tutor's reports on assignments and your reactions to these.

Keep a notebook to record observations, phrases, potential subject matter – anything to stop the germ of a poem or story from getting lost. You may also find it useful to keep a commonplace book to store all the visual or written material that catches your interest and which might be useful or excite your imagination.

Planning ahead

This Level 3 course represents 600 hours of learning time. Allow around 20% of this time for reflection and learning log development. The course should take about a year to complete if you spend around 12 hours each week on it, but you'll need to allow extra time for redrafting if you decide to have your work on this course formally assessed.

As with all OCA courses, these course materials are intended to be used flexibly but keep your tutor fully informed about your progress.

Writing 3: Your Own Portfolio is divided into five parts corresponding to the five assignments. Each part discusses essential elements of the process of producing and ordering poems or stories for publication, with examples, and considers what's involved in writing poems and stories: what you need to think about and do. Each part offers projects which aim to direct your activity more specifically and lead to the production of an assignment. The projects will help in the developments of a variety of skills. While there is much freedom to follow personal inclination in the content of assignments, you're encouraged to focus in each on different aspects of poetry and prose.

To start with, your assignments will consist of about six poems of not more than 30 lines each or a short story of 2,500–3,000 words. (Your tutor may encourage you to submit longer pieces later in the course.)

Along with the poems and stories, you'll send a short commentary (around 500 words) on the writing process, so that your tutor can learn more about the thinking that has gone into each poem or story and be helped to know what advice to give.

Managing your time

Each part of the course should take about 120 hours to complete. You'll need to decide how to divide this time in a way that works effectively for you.

The time you spend on each part of the course will depend on how quickly you work, the time available to you, how easy or hard you find each exercise, and how quickly you want to complete the course. Don't worry if you take more or less time than suggested provided that you're not getting too bogged down in a particular part of the course and that your tutor is happy with the work you're producing. If it helps, draft a rough study plan and revisit this at the end of each part. The course structure is intended to be flexible, but it's always useful to bear deadlines in mind.

Reading

You'll find a list of reading and resources at the end of this course guide and on the OCA website.

Referencing your reading

Whenever you read something that you might want to refer to in your projects and assignments, get into the habit of taking down the full reference to the book, article or website straight away. You must fully reference any other work that you draw on if you plan to go for formal assessment. To do this you should use the Harvard system of referencing – there is a guide to referencing using the Harvard system on the OCA website. Getting down the full reference at the time will save you the frustration of having to hunt for the details of a half-remembered reference long after the event – and ensure that you don't inadvertently plagiarise someone else's work.

The critical review

All Level Three courses require a short essay critically reviewing a contemporary writer, movement or body of work. You'll submit this as part of your final assignment, but it's a good idea to start planning it now. You should aim for about 2,500–3,000 words. If you decide to submit your work for assessment, the critical review will count for 10% of the final mark.

You might choose to write about the nature-inspired poetry of Ted Hughes, for example, or short story writing from the Caribbean or Indian sub-continent. Or you might simply pick a contemporary short fiction author or poet and write about their work in more detail. (If you choose this option you'll be expected to have read a range of their work!)

Include some thoughts about your critical review in your reflective commentary for Assignment Two so that your tutor can begin to guide you.

Continue to think about and plan your critical review as you work through the course. For example, you might want to draft an outline and submit this to your tutor with Assignment Three or Four. You can then plan where to go from there in the light of your tutor's comments.

Your Own Portfolio

Part one

Entering the imagination



October Morning Sir George Clausen

Introduction

When I began to consider the creative process, I was somewhat bewildered as to how I might start to break down a system which for the most part exists in a pre-verbal form and acts in a way which appears at first glance to be illogical and amorphous. The answer, I soon discovered, was not to try and fit logic to it but to observe the series of steps that seemed to happen in creative writing. Interestingly, a pattern started to emerge and I now feel that my own creative process can be split into a series of twelve different steps.

The initial stages take place at the pre-lexical level where ideas and words float around as if in some sort of cloud-chamber of the imagination. The ideas bump into each other and combine (mostly very briefly) as though the imagination is trying out different combinations of ideas for size, to see if they fit the purpose, or to see if they have interest or originality. Sometimes these combinations are stable, becoming the germ around which similar ideas circulate, gravitating, as it were, to the available centre of mass. The process may accelerate and you can be carried forward on a wave of inspiration, or it can be slow and languid and patience will be required while the amorphous mass finds its shape. The unfortunate thing is that it is a process which you (at least the conscious you) do not control. In fact any attempt to exert control or pressure of any kind (even to attempt to take up a pen and write) at this stage will usually result in a dead end. As Ted Hughes put it *"you keep your eyes, your ears, your nose, your taste, your touch, your whole being on the thing you are turning into words. The minute you flinch, and take your mind off the thing, and begin to look at the words and worry about them ... then your worry goes into them and they set about killing each other."* (Hughes, Ted, 1967, *Poetry In The Making*, p. 18)

The control comes later after the feelings and ideas have achieved some more advanced verbal form. This is a completely different phase of the creative process. In the lexical stage you are concerned with structure, form, the right word, the sound, the rhythm – all of that. It is a process which is much easier to describe than the fairly nebulous pre-lexical stage, where the concerns are your ability to engender the exact set of feeling needed, to create and step inside an empathic position where the piece of writing will be centred and which the lexical stage will attempt to express in a form which is aesthetically pleasing to both poet and reader.

In the body of this study I propose to deal with each step in the process as a separate entity made up of smaller sub-processes and with how each of the steps of the process are experienced by me. I think this is the crucial thing here. These processes are described as I experience them. While I generally think of myself as a fairly average type of person, I am aware that in one very important way I am as un-average as they come. I have chosen to devote my life to the production of something which, for much of human kind, has no real value i.e. poetry. I have chosen to follow a minority art form, a minority form of literary endeavour. Even within that small fraternity, I am un-average in my concern for form and metre, my disbelief in completely free verse.

Project Observation

The first thing that became obvious as my study progressed was that everything starts with observation. In the Irish language the word for a poet is 'file' and the word was originally derived from the verb to see and so meant seer. This fact struck me. The poet is responsible for seeing into things and how those things might relate to each other. That was the beginning of it all. The poet should observe accurately, and recall faithfully that which he has observed. In the process of so doing he may use what he has observed in one thing to relate to what he observes in another. Here we have the beginning of metaphor and simile. Here we have the essence of all art and writing including poetry.

I think that all artists have a basic predisposition to observation, no matter what medium they work in. The expression of the observation may be visual, tactile, musical or verbal or indeed a mixture of these, but I think that all expression starts with the thing observed. Firstly, let me clarify what I mean by observed. Once, in a workshop we were challenged to describe a television set. Now, the six members of the group (of poets, mind!) came back with fairly accurate descriptions of the physical dimensions and purpose of the television set. The one thing that all the descriptions had in common was that they were all fairly lifeless – no-one had described the television in operation. The leader then read a description of a television which left me gobsmacked. We had all looked at the television; no-one had actively observed it. His description had included: the feel of the plastic cabinet, the way dust was attracted to the vents at the back, the smell of the back of the set when it heated up.

I remember the moment that I discovered the power of observation. Once, in an effort to chill a bottle of white wine in a hurry I put it in the freezer. I forgot about it. After about an hour my wife asked me to bring her in a glass of wine. When I opened the freezer, the wine bottle was extremely cold, but luckily, it was still liquid. I took the bottle out, uncorked it and attempted to pour a glass. As the wine reached the mouth of the bottle it started to solidify, not just the wine at the mouth, but all of it. I remember watching in amazement as the solidification passed through the wine in a sort of dendritic manner until it became a semi-solid lump of slush in the bottle.

I could not fathom this. I had taken the wine out of the freezer and into a warm room. Therefore, if it was liquid in the freezer how could it freeze in the warmth of the kitchen? This bothered me. I replayed the incident in my head, over and over, in slow motion, changing my imaginative viewpoint, getting inside the wine. Then I saw it. I knew why it had happened. I imagined myself as a molecule of wine. At first, I was in a large volume in the body of the bottle. I did not freeze because I was in a large volume with a low surface area. As the wine poured, I entered the neck of the bottle. Towards the lip I was in very shallow wine in contact with the freezing neck and lip. I was in a small volume with a proportionately high surface area. I froze. Then I realised that the process after that, when all the wine froze, was simply seeding. I had become a seeding crystal. The wine had been cold enough all along to freeze: it was

merely waiting for a seeding crystal. The shallow wine in the neck provided that when it froze. Hence the dendritic pattern due to the shape of the water molecules themselves and how they interact with each other in the freezing process.

I realised also the process behind the realisation. I realised that the ability to make the leap from science class over twenty years ago to the wine that night was an integral part of my creative process. I start with an observed physicality. I observe it in enough detail to be able to model it from other angles and even to enter the model. I had observed the 20 year old science experiment and the freezing wine closely enough to be able to replay both in my head, to be able to stop, slow and rewind the tapes at will, to make them run parallel enough to make the connection.

I realised that artistic observation is the first step. For example, one foggy night coming back from Enniskillen to Falcarragh and going over the Muckish Gap when I was not all that familiar with the road, I got lost. I have a feeling that someone changed the signs around. It is a little-known national sport in Ireland to make road signs point the opposite way that they are meant to, which makes travel for the unwary tourist especially interesting. Anyway, however it was that I got lost, I ended up in a cul-de-sac facing a gated lane with little or nothing near me but what must have been blackthorn trees. These trees have a particularly gnarled texture and shape and take on another eerie dimension when ghosted on a background of fog. They had a strange nobility and beauty about them. They attracted my eye and before too long I was noticing how they attached themselves to their environment and various other features which I later used in the poem 'Trees' in their metaphoric expression as sentinels and guardians of the land, synonymous with the Gaelic language and Gaeltacht people and their continued endurance.

*generation upon generation hanging on –
the broken children of the rock.*

Fog has a wonderful way of making a landscape look utterly surreal and, sometimes, inanimate objects are imbued with a sort of life and movement. This is exactly what happened in this instance, the trees themselves became mysterious and vaguely threatening. I began to think of something else. The topography of this landscape has not changed a great deal since the time of The Plantation apart from one rather salient detail, that is, that the forests which once rendered Ulster an impenetrable fortress to the invader have gone. The original forests were a mixture of native deciduous trees like oak and ash with an under-canopy of blackthorn and whitethorn. These last two were crucial as they actually were more of a barrier than any other. It was principally these and the treacherous bog land that kept Ulster untouched for many years.

*These are the last of their line, would-be spears
or Celtic brooches pinning sky and dark
and rock in place. Stunted runts that clawed
and stabbed and kept the invader out for centuries.*

I now began to think along the lines that these trees could be emblematic for the remnants of the Gaelic culture just as they themselves are remnants of this once great natural barrier and ally of the Irish. Further, the trees could be held to be metaphoric for the people themselves, in their fierce pride and independence, even though the foundations of their existence are shrinking and unstable. I began to build a certain level of pathetic fallacy around the trees, imbuing them with the capability to still endeavour to perform their old function as ally and guardian while at the same time questioning what makes these trees (and of course by metaphoric association these people) stubbornly continue in their attempts at the preservation of a culture and language under extreme threat. All of this had its roots firmly in observation.

*Brittle-beautiful their fingerings,
their black bracing of the dark that grasps
at earth and heaven, keels to snatch
and whisper news of the strangers' coming.*

The process of driving in the fog was also internalised and remembered and manifested itself for later use in the poem 'Into The Dark'. I remembered the observations made on the journey: how I had to inch my way along carefully watching the sides of the road because there is a steep drop to one side. I later used that experience but changed it so that the whole thing took on internal significance, relating to the inward journey into the imaginative landscape where poems are to be found (tripped over sometimes!).

*I have picked my way
with headlights,
inching the verges
that disappear in the dip
and rise of the road.*

I began to think of the internal qualities of this landscape, a place that can be treacherous – witness the mental problems of various poetic geniuses – yet beautiful. This is a place where most of the time you don't so much see where you are going as feel your way through the maze of composition until you hit upon that solid gleaming item upon which poems are based – the truth, the bit you bring back and show to the world in the poem. I began to examine the one in terms of the other, the feeling of being lost and not knowing quite where you are going and

trying to steer along the windy road without ending up over the side on an unexpectedly sharp curve. This metaphor seemed to fit the process of finding and crafting a poem rather well. Many of my poems start with similar observations, which are then used as raw materials for poetry.

*I have lunged in the dark
and felt that momentary lapse
into air, the surprise
of landing safe and sudden
in the cornering darkness;*



Crab Spider Clifton Pugh

Exercise: Observation

Pick a process, any process and watch it very carefully. It can be anything – a fire beginning to light, a spider spinning a web – any process that involves a series of identifiable steps. When you've finished watching it, close your eyes and visualise it. Now try and write out the process as clearly and exactly as you can. Try not to miss even the slightest detail. What does the process remind you of? Can you relate it to something else, something completely different perhaps? Now try and describe this second process in terms of the first. Where does this succeed, where does it fall down? How could it be improved?

Project Play

Play is necessary. Play is that part of creation when you give yourself permission to idle a little, to let the mind wander and allow the observations that you've made to bounce off each other. You give yourself permission to be as strange and insane as you like. Sometimes the strange combinations of ideas are the most intriguing and while they may be of little direct use, now and again they lead on to something that is useful. Let's take an example. If we start with the cliché 'as black as coal', obviously the language here is tired. You realize that it needs to be spiced up so you go through some strange connotations. You freewheel, you allow yourself combinations like: as coaly as the black, as coal-black as the coley's heart, where coley is a local word for a changeling. This gives you 'black as a malartán', another word for changeling from the Irish meaning cursed, so then you get 'the curse-black night sat like a malartán on the hill' which in turn mutates to the following lines from my poem 'After The Battle':

*Night cursed its way through the valley,
lay like a malartán in the cradle of two hills.*

Suddenly you're getting somewhere – and all from playing around with an old cliché.

This playing process is occurring all the time. One idea suggests the other without any great conscious or even real verbal effort. The process of play just turns up the heat, excites the idea-atoms that bit more so that they fly around faster, bump into and combine with other idea-atoms to form compounds that are unusual, which would not normally occur. These combinations, if they are stable (or can be made stable), become the basic unit and staple diet of poetry. The composer George Ives called this process being interested in "the cracks between the piano keys" (quoted in Swafford, Jan, 1996, *Charles Ives: A Life With Music*, p. 46). He was interested in the notes that were lost between the quanta levels of the piano keyboard. The composition of poetry can be regarded as something similar. Poetry is not altogether about what is said. What is unsaid, hinted at, alluded to, or avoided is just as important. The way you say something counts for everything. This is how play can help.

My poem 'Amergin's Song' originated from a germ of an idea suggested by the story of Amergin. Amergin was the magician-poet of the Milesian race, said to have composed the first poem ever written in Ireland, 'The Song of Amergin'. This first ever poem is an act of claiming the land for his people and is a sort of lay which announces that he is, in turn, aspects of the landscape, the animals and fish etc. The following is from my translation of 'The Song of Amergin':

*I am poetry – I am fire on the brain
I am sea-wind breathing you to paradise
I am inundation – I bring doom to your plain
I am breaker tearing at your rock*

When we read the versions handed down they now seem rather crude and unremarkable pieces of poetry, which imply claiming through finding unity with all things, but we are also told that these 'words' were powerful, the arrangement magical and that the sound of a word was believed to hold power of itself, so that the combined words could reinforce each other's power and produce a type of spell or incantation. When read directly for sense, it was unremarkable. Considered also in terms of its music, vibration and resonances, it became powerful. It was in fact a type of performative statement not unlike Christ's "This is my body" during the last supper, and which is repeated during the Roman Catholic mass. That power is what I felt needed to be expressed in my poem 'Amergin's Song'.

*Carried where the word carries
power of itself, driving
meaning to the stuttering
engine of the brain, sparking*

I became fascinated by this theory of resonance and vibration, for isn't that in effect what every poet attempts to achieve, resonance through the ordinary which lifts the experience onto the plain of art? I began to play with the idea, asking myself: what if anything was possible? I asked myself this question until everything was up for grabs, I freed myself to play, to experiment with language, to see if I could imitate not the strict sense of the original that a translation might, but the actual act of the original, claiming the right to declare that the word is powerful of itself. After all, one of the basic Christian tenets states that "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God" and as writers surely we also believe in the innate power of the word, otherwise we would not have chosen this as our form of expression, we'd be painters, musicians or sculptors. There must be an attempt at communion with the word. We must internalise it and trust it and believe it can have the desired effect. We must believe in it – a fact alluded to in the last lines of 'Amergin's Song'.

*until we become words on the wind
scattered to sky, tree, land;
until they become body and blood;
until we eat, drink, believe.*

This poem was born not in effect to make sense of the idea behind 'The Song of Amergin' but to find some correlative of it, which might in effect hold a mirror up to the theory behind it. So, this poem is not to be read purely for sense alone, for indeed the sense and the syntax are difficult, but for the effect of its tonal quality as a vehicle to transfer emotion and the magical idea. It is an experiment to see if our modern sense-centred brains can still operate on a level where logic is subordinate to the magical sense in the way shamanic societies perceive it. It is

not however a purely tonal poem either, there is a certain sense, perhaps not fully logical, which exists in its convolutions of syntax and allows the meaning to be felt as a glancing blow without being fully grasped.

*The ink of his mind opens, spills
to take wing from a cliff field;
to soar his words, wish them
to a high wind, where they scatter
to a different syntax.*



Detail from *Old couple conversing* William Strang

Exercise: Play

Take a cliché and play around with it. Twist it around until it starts to feel like it has been given a new lease of life. Now try and work a series of images around that.

Do they begin to congeal into a theme? If they do, run with it and see where it takes you. Take another phrase, this time maybe a well-known quote or saying, and try and work it into something fresh – there are a number of ways to do this. You can try and argue with it, or maybe just find the exception – the set of circumstances where the quote or saying no longer holds up. You can try and illustrate it. Either way, play around until you generate images and try and work them into a poem or story.

Finally, try combining the two poems or two plotlines – in what ways do they hang together? How do they differ? When you juxtapose them, what does the creative space between them generate? How do can you exploit this?

Project Empathy

Steven Spender said, *"The poet, above all else, is a person who never forgets certain sense-impressions, which he has experienced and which he can re-live again and again as though with all of their original freshness."* (quoted in Ghiselin, Brewster, (ed.), 1952, *The Creative Process*, p. 121). E. E. Cummings was of the opinion that *"The artist is not a man who describes but a man who feels."* (quoted in Cohen, Milton A., 1987, *Poet & Painter*, p. 73). Gary Snyder has expanded on that theme by saying that to write he must *"re-visualize it all,"* (Snyder, Gary, 1980, *The Real Work*, p. 32) while Martin Buber tellingly defined empathy as *"to glide within one's own feeling into the dynamic structure of an object...as it were to trace it from within, understanding the formation and motoriality (bewegtheit) of the object with one's own muscles: it means to transpose oneself over there and in there."* (quoted in Root-Bernstein, Robert and Michele, 2001, *Sparks Of Genius*, p. 186).

I feel that these are the key points which govern the poetic imagination in general and my own in particular and I feel that my own method of visualization needs to be explained. It is as though I carry within my imagination a sort of mannequin of myself, which is shifted into certain positions and postures by sense impressions, that these are recorded on the mannequin and stored much as a model can be stored away in a box until such time as I require that particular set of sense impressions to be retrieved and used. I take out the mannequin and I use it to transfer the set postures of the feelings onto my own. In effect I enter into the mannequin. I become a composite of me and the sense impressions of the other persona that I have put on. I am then ready to describe what I feel, to transfer the feeling through the vehicle of the poem, maybe using different narrative conditions to those which set the imprint, but narrative conditions nonetheless which produce the equivalent feelings to the sense impression figured by the mannequin in my imagination.

Undoubtedly, the analogy I have given has its difficulties: how for instance can an emotion be translated into a posture of a mannequin? The answer is not easy. It is the best way I have of describing the process. If I might be allowed a little licence I suggest that each sense impression makes a change to the mannequin, a change from the neutral situation if you like. While these changes are not the changes that might be made to a doll by a child with a limb twisted here and bent there, the changes are equivalent in that they set a certain emotional posture upon the mannequin which can be preserved as a record, retrieved and used by the imagination to set up exactly the feeling engendered by the original set of sense impressions.

For instance, if I was in a situation where I was experiencing grief and anger mixed with relief and pity, as when a relative dies mercifully quickly, thereby avoiding the long drawn out battle with a cancer, then each feeling will make a change to the imaginary mannequin. The part of the model which codes for grief will become activated by a certain degree: likewise the parts which deal with relief, pity and anger will be activated to varying extents. This mixture of activations will be stored on the mannequin in the box labelled 'The Death Of X' and will be

stored in the memory until such time as I am stimulated to retrieve the emotional memory, perhaps for a poem which deals with the same subject but under different but equivalent conditions.

This is I think what Eliot meant when he said that the *"objective correlative"* was *"a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."* (quoted in Scully, James, 1970, *Modern Poets On Modern Poetry*, p. 58). This is where I think the objective correlative comes into its own, in that the emotional equivalents may not necessarily be found in identical circumstances. To use the above example, the objective correlative of 'The Death Of X' may be expressed poetically by a totally different situation which nonetheless transfers the same emotional message to the reader.

What has all this to do with empathy? Well this is also pretty much the process by which I achieve empathy with someone. I take the set of circumstances that this person finds him or herself in and I attempt to fit those circumstances to my emotional mannequin and see what the resultant feelings generated are. I can then be reasonably sure that this might be how the other person is feeling under these circumstances. Obviously, it's not just as mechanical as that, but it is one way to picture the process. I think this is what Ted Hughes was referring to when he described *"some instinctive and involuntary mimicry within us that reproduces that person at first glance, imitates him so exactly that we feel at once all he feels, all that gives uniqueness to the way he walks or does what he is doing."* (Hughes, Ted, 1967, *Poetry In The Making*, p. 121).

The process by which this persona is allowed to speak follows this empathic process, the creation of an emotional mannequin significantly different enough from my own to give it some sense of distinct character, but which also allows me to imagine and feel its emotional reaction under a set of circumstances which I impose upon it. For instance in the poem 'Domestic' I have used the persona of a subordinate to Partholon, who observes the discovery of Dalgade and the slave and plays an active part in the resulting vengeance. I have taken what I imagine about the character of this subordinate, placed the circumstances upon him and allowed him to narrate the incident as though he was talking to a group of his peers.

*fetch'd the bastard to his knees
and carried the head off him,
fucked it in the river.*

I once overheard a similarly violent domestic incident related in much the same manner – I based the persona on the speech patterns of the teller of that story, as remembered after about fifteen years and sent him back to narrate the brutal incident from legend where Partholon

catches his young wife having sex with a slave and wreaks a terrible vengeance. I could not resist allowing him his rough streetwise cant because the idea behind it and the narrator's obvious bloodthirsty enjoyment fits into the brutality of our society as much as into the legendary one.

*.....clarting,
clamouling round her*

*lying askant her,
rubbing fork to ghowl
and her panting.*



Hunted slaves Richard Andsell

Exercise: Empathy

Pick a story from a newspaper, preferably one about conflict, and get inside one of the characters. Speak for them. Tell their story in the way that they would want it to be heard (or maybe in a way they wouldn't want it heard) – what is the truth?

Now try and tell the conflicting story. Allow the other character the same licence you allowed the first – try not to 'take sides' but allow the other character to speak their 'truth'. Again juxtapose these stories. What does the creative space between them say? How can we exploit this? Change either or both stories as necessary to gain the maximum effect.