

# Creative Writing Coursework

## Section 1: Opening to a novel

**2,309 words**

### Nothing to see here

#### Chapter 1

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*"We meet no ordinary people in our lives"*

- C.S Lewis

On an unremarkable day in an unextraordinary year there walked a perfectly ordinary man down the street in the usual manner. No passer-by would have thought anything more of him, and indeed there was not much that one could think of such a man, even if one had known more about him. The sky was a dreary and uninspiring murky grey; the houses round about were an equally dismal colour that could hardly be recognised as russet, so faded was the brickwork. On such a day one might have expected rain, but the heavens remained closed. Maybe God did not judge the day worthy of the freshness that comes with a downpour, or maybe the skies were as weary as the population below and did not see any reason for exerting themselves. Despite the lack of moisture, there was little movement in the street: the bustling crowds had resumed the mundane tasks typical of 364 of the 365 days per annum, and spirits were firmly dampened. The day after the day after Christmas is perhaps the most depressing twenty-four hours of the season, when the festivities have ended, the food has all been enjoyed, the presents have all been opened and the relatives have all gone home. It was on this day that he journeyed forth into the afternoon.

## Exemplar 1 - an A

Why then, did he choose such an untimely time as this to wander? He appeared to be entirely usual, the stereotypical gentleman: how then, did he find his way to the door of a certain Mr James Bradfield, before the new year was upon us? Indeed, he was wholly unremarkable to the stranger, but delve a little deeper and there was a stranger truth to be told than that which can be assumed at first glance. He had always been a law-abiding man and a strict enforcer of the law in his own household. Those who knew him well would have thought him a respectable, well-to-do gentleman; those who knew him best would have thought him a cold-hearted man.

The residents of that household, after hearing a rat-tat-tat on their oaken entryway, were neither friendly nor welcoming – one might even call them hostile – but after a moment's fiery discussion they granted the fellow passage into their anything-but-humble abode. At that time I knew nothing of the nature of that meeting, and nothing of the nature of the man who had arranged it, but time soon revealed the history of this ordinary gentleman to one equally as ordinary.

I have recollected the day as unremarkable: so it was. There was nothing of interest in it, and I am sure that I would not recall it, save for the events that followed, which are intrinsically linked to that day and to the ordinary man whom I saw walking down Main Street on his way to nowhere in particular. It was not until many years had passed that I discovered the significance of the lone wanderer's amblings and came to remark upon such atrocities as the two gentlemen had bestowed upon those around them, but I shall preserve these discoveries for later in the narrative; our tale has not quite begun.

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Chapter 2

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*If a man tried to buy love  
with all his wealth,  
his offer would be utterly scorned.*

- *Song of Songs, ch8 v7*

The last leaf of autumn, like an infant torn from its mother, lost its battle with the wind and came to rest upon a frozen wasteland – that is, the backyard of 48 Temple Avenue. In the night a fresh covering of snow had fallen. A rapidly ageing man, broken by his problems, made his way slowly but surely up the path he had hastily walked down many years ago. He was not looking to be reconciled with the ones he had once loved and so haplessly lost, but he was merely hoping to settle the matter which lay heavily upon his heart and mind. In his hand he carried a small white envelope with the address clearly printed in Italic, typographic script - it looked almost as if it had been written with a quill pen, as opposed to the biro which in reality had etched the faint crevice onto the blank slate – and in the far right hand corner, perfectly aligned with the sharp, crisp edges of the delicate package was a small, perfect blue postage stamp: 1<sup>st</sup> Class. This was immaterial, of course; the contents of the letter were of the utmost importance to its bearer, and it was to be delivered by hand or not at all. The note was already several weeks overdue; it had been written in late September, and by now the bitter frosts of Winter were beginning to set in. Having finally convinced himself that he had worded the explanation in exactly the right way and after preparing himself for the brief, intense yet cold exchange which was sure to follow, the man took the final step towards the portal into his past and knocked. There was no response. Disappointed, but fully aware that he deserved this treatment, the man dropped the pristine envelope through the letter box and traced his steps back along the route he had taken almost twelve years ago. Inside, the note read:

Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2001

Jesse,

## Exemplar 1 - an A

I have no idea what to tell you. For weeks I have been thinking about writing but I have been putting it off because I simply had no clue what to say. I would tell you that I love you and I always have done, but I know that they would just seem like empty words to you. I could apologise for everything I have done to wrong you, I could tell you that I was sorry, but what would that achieve? I have failed you. I have wronged you. I understand that you have been informed about the nature of my sins against you and that I need not inform you further about any of the minute details. If you want nothing more to do with me, I understand entirely, but please promise me this one thing: do not do what I have done.

Your father by blood but not in deed,

Charles Mathieson

It would have appeared to any on-lookers that a man had called with some message for a friend or acquaintance, but on calling he had found the house unoccupied. Again, this was unremarkable; people are not always at home, and it is not unheard of for someone to drop by with a card of some kind. There was nothing peculiar about his dress, the way he walked or the expression in his face. All would have seemed well and nothing wanting, to a stranger. The man, though, was not feeling ordinary. Nothing of the sort. Charles Mathieson was an expert of deception (his work demanded it) and was not unused to hiding his emotions deep in his soul where none but he could access them. His true feelings were buried so far underground that no amount of excavation by psychiatrist, archaeologist or grave-digger could have discovered them. But if you had been the man he was in the position he was in, you would have found that he was empty. He had thrown it all away. Not the business, no; that was thriving. Not his home, nor his car. Not even the millions in the bank. Everything which he had been struggling to achieve now lay in the palm of his hand. He was rich and a complete success in the eyes of society, but to himself he was a complete

## Exemplar 1 - an A

failure. In a single instant, a moment of stupidity and poor judgement, he had cast aside all that was dear to him. Charles Mathieson felt sure that he would never again have the pleasure of loving and being loved by his wife, or his son. That, to him, was the bitterest sense of failure he had ever felt.

What use was all his money now?

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Chapter 3

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*If a little knowledge is dangerous, where is the man who has so much as to be out of danger?*

- *Thomas Huxley*

He had been away for such a very, very long time. Spring was on its way; daffodils were peeping through the snow, and the Earth had no canopy of cloud to taint the brilliance of the vast expanse of open sky. Reaching for his key, he hesitated for a moment before thrusting it into the lock and entering the familiar hallway of 48 Temple Avenue. A quick glance around the room: everything appeared to be much the same as the way he had left it, the way it had always been, the way it was likely to stay. A second look revealed a perfectly ordinary object laying on the corner of a table: an envelope. Those who were unaccustomed to the household would not have thought anything of it, but the master noticed it almost immediately and, thinking it strange, he pounced. Having opened the letter, a certain man by the name of Mathieson was overcome by emotion.

Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> May 1989

Dear Jesse,

I don't suppose you remember your dad? I'm not sure why you would. I'm writing this now, while I can still recall events clearly and before this arthritis renders my fingers completely useless. When you get this it will be your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I won't be around anymore. I'm sorry. I hope you know that I love you and I'm sure I'd be proud of the man you've turned out to be; I always said your dear mum was raising you right. What I mean to say is that although you may not remember your father, your old Nan does. You mustn't think ill of him, sweetheart; he was a good man and he treated you and your mother well. That is, he did until he got involved with the wrong sorts of people and it all went downhill

## Exemplar 1 - an A

from there, I'm afraid. I know he never meant to do you any harm - my son was a gentle soul, he wouldn't have knowingly hurt a fly. I'm sorry that it turned out this way, my darling... it shouldn't have done. Charles should never have done a thing like he did. Some people begin well but don't finish up quite how they're supposed to. Your father was no exception; he let you down, but I don't want you to hate him. He couldn't help it once he set out on the wrong track, you know? I'm not writing this to justify his actions, but I implore you not to do as he did; be a better man than your father turned out to be, eh? For me?

Yours always,

Nan xx

He did not know how the letter had ended up on the dining room table in his absence, but he did not think of it at that moment. He was 19 years old, but for various reasons he had not received the note until now. Perhaps the most obvious reason was that he had spent the last few months studying away from home and had not seen the necessity for a return trip; the main reason, though, remained hidden from him until sometime later. The pleas from his kind, sweet Grandmother who had recently departed from this world struck a chord within him. Jesse Mathieson had always wanted to play the guitar as a child, and since his Nan's death, he had taught himself. Now he sat with his legs crossed on the ancient carpet and plucked his raw emotions out on the strings until his fingers grew as red as the lipstick his mother had worn every day up until the divorce.

He had never found out what peculiar circumstances Mr Bradfield had placed his father - an ordinary gentleman - in, or for what reason the latter had left his wife and child at the time they needed him most. All that he had managed to glean from his mother was that his father's work had gradually become more important to him than family life, but in her condition Mathieson Jr dared

## Exemplar 1 - an A

not probe her any further. It was no secret that for years their marriage had been on the rocks; worse, it had been buried ten-feet under the rubble and no-one would have thought to try and rescue it from those kinds of depths. Still, he was not satisfied with this knowledge. Jesse Mathieson was no fool: he was well aware that there was more to his seemingly unremarkable father than anyone dared admit. He was sure of it, and he was determined to find the truth. Of course, the pursuit of knowledge is also a dangerous thing, and has ruined many a good man.

Perhaps it would be appropriate at this point in the narrative to introduce myself to you, dear reader. I am the dearest friend and most-trusted confidant of the Mr Mathiesons: both senior and junior. I am writing this in retrospect, knowing what I know now of how the story began, and with a good indication as to how it ends. The day I have described in the opening passage was the day I first set eyes on C. Mathieson. You may think that this day – contrary to my interjections – holds great significance, since it is the day around which this novel revolves. In supposing this to be the case you would be well justified. However, I call it unremarkable because that was how it seemed to me then; there is somewhere a lesson to be learned in all this, I believe, which I would be glad to explain to you (as elegantly as I can) if you will persist in following this tale.

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## Section 2: Poetry

531 words

### Scrutiny of the soul

#### Villanelle

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A story that demands to be told,

Of a youth on the verge of manhood:

The tale of men and their lust for gold.

He takes a wife, to have and to hold;

His love burns bright for a time.

A story that demands to be told.

Passionate love fades, grows cold;

Thinks the youth:

“’Tis not the case with gold!”

And now, by selfish ambition fuelled,

The foolish man paves his way to ruin,

History his warning; the outcome foretold.

Alas! When he is grey and old,

Money gone, friends and relatives none,

He reflects on the story, forever to be told:

How he wasted his life in a quest for gold.

**Alone**

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Do any of you know

How it feels to be

Without your father?

*Yes, I'm sure someone knows.*

To trust someone

And find that you should never have trusted  
them?

Can any one of you explain

To me, how it hurts

To be betrayed by your father?

*There must be somebody.*

To love someone

And discover that you should never have  
loved them?

What if that somebody was your father?

Does anybody understand

What it feels like?

### The Right Path

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Forget him!

I knew not why I did,

Reject him!

Since they gave me sound counsel;

Despise him!

But I chose not to do what they bade.

These are the words of my head.

Acknowledge him!

I knew it to be

Accept him!

What anyone would have done;

Forgive him!

But I chose my own way instead.

This seemed more natural to me.

Ignore him!

So, ignoring the voices of my friends and my

Refuse him!

head,

Detest him!

I chose to follow my heart instead

Was the advice of my friends.

Yes, I chose to follow my heart instead.

### Cinquain

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Aching

From the bitter

Pain of losing all that

Was dear to me, because I loved

Money.

## A wasted life

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Why isn't it raining?

Expressionless skies reflect an empty soul:

Some live a lifetime yet achieve nothing.

I spent my childhood dreaming, planning,

I loved with passion in my youth.

Why isn't it raining?

The master of these skies, though controlling

All weathers, has yet to tame my heart:

Some live a lifetime and yet achieve nothing.

I detest the man I'm becoming!

Money's not always been my ultimate goal.

Why isn't it raining?

I wonder what fatal seeds I've been sowing.

Many do not see the dangers of selfishness,

Some live a lifetime and yet achieve nothing.

Pray, do not follow the life I've been living!

Prey to ambition, a victim of desire:

I've lived a lifetime and yet achieved nothing.

Why isn't it raining?

## Reflection

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Looking back, I feel as though

I'm staring at a looking glass:

Not much to see, not much to show,

For all the years that I've let pass.

I married, had children once

But I left them all behind.

For money, then by my imprudence

My life became unrefined.

I can look at myself no longer,

What kind of man have I become?

All that remains is for me to shun

That foul image, my hideous soul.

No loving words will come; none console.

# Reflective Commentary

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The creative process began as a series of drafts which were then work shopped in class by my peers. These were originally unconnected and unrefined, but after countless re-drafting, two clear sections of poetry and of prose began to emerge. To begin with I knew not what the theme of my writing would be, but I soon developed an idea for a story which became the foundation of what is now my coursework. My intentions were simple: I wished to create a piece (or pieces) of writing which would evoke an emotional response from the reader. Literature should ultimately, in my opinion, have a lasting impact on those who read it. This change could be a theological or moral change of perspective, or it could inspire a feeling of empathy towards humanity; whatever the case, I hoped to inspire a difference in the reader's ideas - hopefully for the better. I also intended to create literature that was accessible for both young adults and more mature readers.

I am aware that creative writing is essentially a balancing act between absence and presence; between showing and telling. When writing the opening to my novel '*Nothing to see here*,' I aimed to give the reader a clear understanding of what was happening, without explaining anything in depth. A gradual introduction to the narrative which would allow the reader to be actively involved and to piece together the story whilst getting to know the characters was my main ambition.

The prose section is in no way a complete novel, for I have not yet addressed the main issue of the narrative. This was intentional: I decided that I did not want to reveal too much to the reader in the first three chapters, so as to retain their interest. If I were to continue writing it, I would gradually reveal the 'sins' which the father is supposed to have committed against his son. These, if expressed plainly, would seem terrible in the eyes of the law and the reader; however, I hoped to take the reader's focus off the crime and place it instead on the consequences. The reason for the separation of father and son is Mr Charles Mathieson's association with a drug smuggler by the

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name of James Bradfield. I have mentioned this man in the second paragraph of the opening chapter, but to begin with he appears insignificant to the reader. Again, I did this for effect: the reader's assumption that a character they know nothing about is uninteresting and unimportant would prove to be foolish when at last they discover, in the conclusion, how crucial he is to the narrative. This method of gradually revealing the plot to the reader was inspired by the great novels of Charles Dickens, such as *Little Dorrit* and *Great Expectations*. I hoped to inform my readership of what their response would be when they found out some vital information, without telling them what they wanted to know - so as to increase their thirst for reading the story. There was also a secondary reason for my concealing the crux of the story; the overall message of the novel which I hoped to portray to the reader is that not everything is as it seems. I chose the title '*Nothing to see here*' because it is as if the novel is disguising itself behind its cover. In a similar way, the characters are not always what people assume them to be. In *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, Mr Darcy is presented as a selfish man and Mr Wickham is loved by all; however, the gentlemen's roles are reversed by the end of the novel.

As I have already mentioned, these pieces initially began as small sections of writing with no common theme. Many of these were responses to tasks set in class; for example, one began when I was given the task of writing a descriptive paragraph of water. Only the first two sentences of this draft were eventually used to form the opening of the second chapter, but I have alluded to water many times in my work. In 'A wasted life,' I have used rain as a symbol of usefulness. This idea came to me in a year of drought, when my mother (who is a keen gardener) would often reflect on how there was not enough rain for the plants to survive and how crops had been suffering. The narrator laments about the lack of the rain, appealing to anyone who will listen: 'Why isn't it raining?' In fact, the narrator in this poem and the character of Charles Mathieson in '*Nothing to see here*' are one and the same: "Maybe God did not judge the day worthy of the freshness that comes with a downpour, or maybe the skies were as weary as the population below and did not see any reason for exerting themselves."

## Exemplar 1 - an A

The overall theme of my poetry and prose came from my 'Villanelle', which features in my collection of poetry 'Scrutiny of the soul'. This piece sets the tone for the rest of my writing; it speaks of the consequences of chasing after money and leaving your family and friends behind in the process. In my section of prose I attempted to take this idea further by warning the reader of the very thing which society now promotes – money is often seen as a symbol of success in modern society, but history has revealed the dangers which wealth entails. The moral of my poetry and prose are that people matter more than material things such as money, and that no-one is unimportant; in fact, quite the opposite is true: everyone is significant. I have chosen a quotation from C S Lewis as the precursor of Chapter 1 of my novel, as it reflects the moral message of the narrative:

*"We meet no ordinary people in our lives."*

J Mathieson narrates 'Alone' and 'The Right Path' whilst C Mathieson narrates 'Cinquain,' 'A Wasted Life' and 'Reflection.' It is unclear from the poems whether the story will end in separation, or whether it will result in reconciliation. In a way, this is unimportant: the reader is still aware that the son can choose either to forgive or to alienate his father. I intended to have a subtle morality underpinning my poetry and prose: that we should forgive others even if they do not seem to deserve our forgiveness. Whatever they have done to wrong us, the choice is, ultimately, ours.

Poets such as William Carlos Williams and W S Graham have influenced my poetry. As in Williams' 'This is just to say' and 'The Red Wheelbarrow', it is the significance of the line break that adds to the meaning:

“Forgive me  
they were delicious  
so sweet

## Exemplar 1 - an A

and so cold"<sup>1</sup>

Little punctuation is used and it is not needed, since it is the simplicity of the poems which makes their message all the more clear. Cormac McCarthy also uses very little punctuation in his novel *'The Road'*; however, he still manages to say things that are incredibly profound and speak directly to the reader. This was the effect I hoped to achieve in my poetry. Although I have added some punctuation to my final poems that was not in the original drafts, I have done so only in the interest of clarity: I desired to achieve a balance between portraying the meaning to the reader in the simplest possible way and over-simplifying my poems. I have titled my poetry section 'Scrutiny of the soul' because the poems are intended to speak directly to the reader and encourage reflection on oneself.

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<sup>1</sup> Williams, William Carlos, 'This Is Just To Say' in *The William Carlos Williams Reader* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1966) p.32

# Bibliography

1. Williams, William Carlos, 'This Is Just To Say' in *The William Carlos Williams Reader* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1966)