

CONTEMPORARY CULTURES OF WRITING – Spring 2019 seminars

DATES: 15th January– 11th February – 12th March

TIME: All seminars take place from 6.00-8.00pm

Venues: Seminars 2&3 **Room 2BC, FutureLearn, 1-11 Hawley Cres, Camden, London NW1 8NP** Seminar 1 - Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

See [further information](#) about the seminars

Life Stories

At a time when some writers are turning away from fiction towards memoir, while others are seeking to reinvent the novel form for a post-truth era, this series of seminars will look at the burgeoning area of life-writing and engage with how life stories, whether of self or other, are constructed, to what effect and for what purpose. It will consider the role of fiction in rendering the story of a life and reflect on what it means (for self and other) to write from life.

Through presentations by academics, critics, and writers, the spring 2019 seminar series convened by Fiona Doloughan and Heather Richardson on behalf of the Contemporary Cultures of Writing Research Group at the Open University will seek to engage with issues of representation and modes of narration, auto/biographical production and reception, and the impact of new technologies on presentation of self and other.

The seminars are free and take place on Tuesdays from 18.00 – 20.00 in January, February and March. All seminars will be held at Senate House, University of London, Malet Street, London.

- **SEMINAR 1: Writing the self**

Tuesday January 15th, The Court Room, Senate House

This session will be concerned with writing about and constructing a sense of self. It will consider whether this might best be done through factual or fictional means, whether there is such a thing as an authentic self, or whether all accounts of self are necessarily fictions to a greater or lesser degree. It will also consider issues of culture in relation to modes of self-narration.

Novelist and film-maker **Xiaolu Guo** will discuss the construction of self in her recent memoir, *Once Upon A Time in the East*, and in relation to her previous fiction. **Fiona Doloughan**, Senior Lecturer in English (Literature and Creative Writing) at the Open University will contextualize some of the questions the series hopes to address and refer to Guo's work from a literary critical perspective.

- **SEMINAR 2: The lives of others: research and writing**

Monday February 11th, Room 2BC, Futurelearn, Hawley Crescent, Camden

This session will look at what it means to research and write about the lives of others. As well as considering a writer's/biographer's process, it will consider what her/his role might be, including the notion of "to give someone a fair hearing, to do them justice" (Holmes, 2017). It will also address the issue of how to create a dialogue with the past and why it might be important to revisit the lives of others and to reflect on the interplay between a writer and her/his subject. To what extent are the lives of others a foil for aspects of our own lives?

Professor of Poetry at the University of Roehampton **Fiona Sampson** will discuss her recent work including *In Search of Mary Shelley: The Girl Who Wrote Frankenstein* and forthcoming biography of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She will be joined by **Dean de la Motte**, Professor of French and Comparative Literature at Salve Regina University, Newport, Rhode Island. Dean will be discussing his love affair with the Brontës and will be reading from his novel *Oblivion: The Lost Diaries of Branwell Brontë*.

- **SEMINAR 3: Multimodal life stories**

Tuesday March 12th, Room 2BC, Futurelearn, Hawley Crescent, Camden

New and old technologies afford opportunities for inscribing life stories in different media. This session will consider modes of narration that go beyond the textual and/or combine modes to create a multimodal account of a life or lives, looking at diverse approaches including narrative textiles, collective biography and micro-blogging. What are the implications of such methodological innovations in telling people's stories?

Katherine Collins, Leverhulme Early Career Fellow at Oxford's Department of Education from 2019, will read from and discuss a new piece provisionally entitled 'I remember once I was a fine art student', while **Heather Richardson**, Lecturer in Creative Writing at the Open University, will discuss her text and textile project, *A dress for Kathleen*, which has involved the creation of a garment-as-text to explore family and social history.

Organized by the OU's [Contemporary Cultures of Writing Research Group](#) in collaboration with the [Institute of English Studies](#), University of London.

If you have any queries regarding this seminar series, please contact the series convenors, Dr Fiona Doloughan (Fiona.Doloughan@open.ac.uk) and Dr Heather Richardson (Heather.Richardson@open.ac.uk), Department of English and Creative Writing, the Open University.

See [here](#) for further information about the series.