

CW215-30 Composition & Creative Writing

23/24

Department

SCAPVC - Warwick Writing Programme

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Gonzalo Ceron Garcia

Credit value

30

Module duration

20 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This is a core module for second years of QP36 'English Literature and Creative Writing' only. It is available only as a 100% fully assessed module. It proceeds in the form of writing workshops and seminars. Absence from these workshops will severely limit your capacity for achieving strong work. It is not available as an optional module.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

This module introduces students to the question of narrative in all its forms. It acquaints students with the processes involved in writing narrative fiction and non-fiction, including traditional and experimental methods, revision, drafting, editing and considerations of audience, also endowing them with critical insights into works of contemporary and classic literature and the traditional and modern processes of literary production.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

AUTUMN TERM: WEEKS 1–5: SHORT FICTION

In the first 5 weeks of Composition, we'll be focusing on Short Stories. We'll be looking at structure, characterisation, sustaining a voice and advancing theme. We'll be then looking at non-fiction, focusing on experience-based writing, problematizing wordiness and opting for precision and concision to more effectively provoke affective responses with our writing.

It is very important that you do the reading and prepare for each seminar. While the focus of each class will be practical, your tutor will be asking for your notes on the reading (this can be anything that sparked your curiosity) so that you can present them to your peers and we can then start a fruitful discussion.

Week 1: Common People, Unusual Situations – The plotting board

Reading:

- Raymond Carver, Cathedral.
- Ernest Hemingway, Hills Like White Elephants.

Week 2: Post-Modernity in Narrative

Reading:

- George Saunders, Pastoralia.

Week 3: Anger, Politics and Humour

Reading:

- Sherman Alexie, 'The Ballad of Paul Nonetheless', 'Salt' and 'Bird-Watching At Night' in War Dances.
- Lorrie Moore, 'You're Ugly, Too'

Week 4: The Short Tragedy

Reading:

- Tillie Olsen, 'I Stand Here Ironing'
- Virginia Woolf, 'A Haunted House'

Week 5: Bursts of Emotion – Constructing Empathy and Using Super-Objectives

Reading:

- Alice Munro, 'Runaway' in Runaway.

WEEKS 7- 10 NON-FICTION

“Herodotus of Halicarnassus here displays his investigation, so that human achievements may not become forgotten in time, and great and marvellous deeds may not be without their glory.” Herodotus, The Histories

The second unit will examine the process of writing non-fiction investigations into the alien, the familiar, and the personal. In particular, the unit will aim to develop students beyond the narrow focus on the self and the tyranny of the “I”.

NON-FICTION

Week 7: Writing About Politics & Injustice

Reading:

- Anabel Hernández, 'The Hours of Extermination' in The Sorrows of Mexico.
- Sam Jordison, 'Milton Friedman', 'Ronald Reagan' and 'L. Ron Hubbard' in Enemies of the State.

Week 8: Writing From Experience – Issues With The 'Language of Feeling'

Reading: - Caitlin Moran, How To Be A Woman

Week 9: Playing with Genre

Reading: - Paul Ewan, How To Be A Public Author
Week 10: Writing for Publication Workshop & Editing Workshop

SPRING TERM: WEEKS 1–5

FICTION, DISCIPLINE, AND THE IMAGINATION

“Line by line, writing’s not so hard . . . You do a little sentence and then another little sentence. It’s when you allow yourself to think of the totality of what you have to do, of the task which faces you with each book that you feel it’s hard, even terrifying. In my daily work, minimizing the terror is my object.” (Hilary Mantel, “Growing A Tale”)

The first half of this term proposes itself as an antidote to creative – or rather, uncreative – terror and will look at ways in which you can begin, sustain and partially resolve a piece of fiction without losing your poise, hair, nails and sanity. We’ll also consider, week by week, a story or a book that exemplifies some bit of the puzzle – situation, voice, form and structure, character, register, etc. The preceding paragraph could be the beginning to a story. Who is speaking? Where are they speaking/writing? What might happen next? Where might it lead?

Week One:

Now. What are writers writing at the moment? Imagining a situation, peopling and furnishing that situation. Reading: Cat Person, Kristin Roupenian

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/12/11/cat-person>

Carmen Maria Machado, The Husband Stitch: <https://granta.com/the-husband-stitch/>

Week Two:

Where to start: playing with time, large and small.

Tobias Wolff, ‘Bullet in the Brain’

http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_27/section_1/artc2A.html

TC Boyle, ‘Chicxulub’ New Yorker podcast plus discussion with Lionel Shriver

<https://www.newyorker.com/podcast/fiction/lionel-shriver-reads-t-c-boyle>

If we have time, we’ll also discuss inventive use of time in fiction, including Kate Atkinson’s *Life After Life*; Paul Auster’s *4,3,2,1* and Laura Barnett’s *The Versions of Us*. You don’t have to have read any of these (bonus points if you have), but they provide interesting starting points for talking about how writers use time.

Week Three:

Shape and scale (voice, perspective and a whole world in 5000 words) Alice Munro, *Axis*, available via The New Yorker podcast

<https://www.google.co.uk/amp/s/www.newyorker.com/podcast/fiction/lauren-groff-reads-alice-munro/amp>

Lorrie Moore, *Paper Losses*

https://www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2008/jul/04/lorrie.moore.paper.losses?CMP=Share_iOSApp_O

We’ll also refer to *Olive Kitteridge*, by Elizabeth Strout

Week Four:

Voice, dialogue and pace...experimentation and the tyranny of the dreaded Muse (or absence thereof).

George Saunders, *Adams* (via The New Yorker Fiction podcast)

<https://www.newyorker.com/podcast/fiction/joshua-ferris-reads-george-saunders>

We’ll also refer to some extracts from *Days without End*, by Sebastian Barry and *Oranges are Not*

the Only Fruit, by Jeanette Winterson.

Week Five:

Endings. Working towards that final point. The Lottery, by Shirley Jackson

https://sites.middlebury.edu/individualandthesociety/files/2010/09/jackson_lottery.pdf

The Spot, by David Means (discussed on The New Yorker podcast with Jonathan Franzen):

<https://www.newyorker.com/podcast/fiction/jonathan-franzen-reads-david-means>

NON-FICTION, INFORMATION, AND INSIGHT

Week Seven:

The making of memory. Finding a way into making a picture of the past. Joe Brainard's I

Remember. <https://eng10165511.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/brainard-i-remember.pdf>

Inventory, by Carmen Maria Machado (from Her Body and Other Parties)

Week Eight:

Writing, watching, listening: The Loser by Gay Talese. <https://thestacks.deadspin.com/the-loser-the-most-honest-sports-story-ever-written-772260237>

Also H is for Hawk, by Helen Macdonald. Wonderful podcast here:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07wnj7t> and a great discussion about Jeanette Winterson's Why be Happy When You Could be Normal here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/audio/2015/jul/17/jeanette-winterson-helen-macdonald-h-is-for-hawk-podcast>

Week Nine:

Cultural History by personal means Bad Blood by Lorna Sage. Also Priestdaddy by Patricia Lockwood and, if we have time,

Go Gentle into that Goodnight:

<https://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/go-gentle-into-that-good-night>.

If we have time...

George Orwell, The Hanging http://www.george-orwell.org/A_Hanging/0.html

Week Ten:

Politics, objectivity and emotion; exterior and interior reportage. This is the Place to be, by Lara Pawson. Also, Arundhati Roy's essay Democracy: Who's She When She's at Home?

<https://sedosmission.org/old/eng/roy.htm>

We may also discuss at some point (or you may like to look at) the following:

Writers on writing: David Foster Wallace, The Nature of The Fun

<https://www.penusa.org/blogs/mark-program/bookmark-david-foster-wallaces-nature-fun>

Lorrie Moore, 'How to Become a Writer' <http://www.sfuadcnf.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/How-to-Become-a-Writer-Lorrie-Moore.pdf>

Orwell: Why I write. http://orwell.ru/library/essays/wiw/english/e_wiw

Zadie Smith, Fail Better: <http://faculty.sunydutchess.edu/oneill/failbetter.htm>

Big ideas: Free Speech [https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2009/02/hitchens200902\(Christopher-Hitchens\)](https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2009/02/hitchens200902(Christopher-Hitchens))

The New Commandments, Christopher Hitchens

<https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2010/04/hitchens-201004>

The tyranny of the 'I'. Stream of consciousness and making it work.

Édouard Levé, *When I look at a strawberry I think of a tongue* (incomplete)

<https://www.theparisreview.org/letters-essays/6078/when-i-look-at-a-strawberry-i-think-of-a-tongue-edouard-leve>

Humour: Kurt Vonnegut, *Dispatch from a Man Without a Country*.

<http://www.spokesmanbooks.com/Spokesman/PDF/90Vonnegut.pdf>

Bad Behaviour, Rebecca Starford

Freakonomics, Steven Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner

The Wild Ways, Robert Macfarlane

A Writer's Coming of Age, Joyce Carol Oates

Notes from a Big Country, Bill Bryson

On Writing Stephen King

Family Life, Akil Sharma

The Last Act of Love, Cathy Rentzenbrink

Cupcakes and Kalashnikovs

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Deploy a reflective approach to the process of composition.
- Embark on research to support their writing.
- Deploy the rules, conventions and possibilities of written and spoken language in several forms.
- Demonstrate a creative engagement with the expressive and imaginative powers of language.
- Demonstrate a commitment to their own writing.
- Read and respond critically to published work and to work in progress.
- Engage with the historical and cultural dimensions of language use and literature, including media technologies.
- Demonstrate a working understanding of editorial skills.
- Demonstrate a working understanding of issues around reading in translation.
- Engage with others in order to improve their own and others' work.
- Generate original creative work.
- Grasp the importance of creative and intellectual experiment, risk-taking and process over product.

Indicative reading list

The Bloody Chamber, Angela Carter

Grief is the Thing with Feathers, Max Porter

Days Without End, Sebastian Barry

Life After Life, Kate Atkinson

The Golden Gate, Vikram Seth

Swimming Home, Deborah Levy

The God of Small Things, Arundhati Roy

The Moor's Last Sigh, Salman Rushdie

A Fine Balance, Rohinton Mistry

Our Story Begins, Tobias Wolff

Bring Out the Dog, Will Mackin

Sunrise Sunset, Edwige Dandicat

A Love Story, Samantha Hunt

The Raw Shark Texts, Steven Hall

The Green Road, Anne Enright

Olive Kitteridge, Elizabeth Strout

Fates and Furies, Lauren Groff

Collected Short Stories, by T.C. Boyle

American Pastoral, Philip Roth

Choke, Fight Club, Chuck Palahniuk

Interpreter of Maladies, Jhumpa Lahiri

Blake Morrison: And When did you Last See your Father?

Giving Up the Ghost, Hilary Mantel

Strangers in Iceland, Sarah Moss

The Diving Bell and the Butterfly, Jean Dominique Bauby

Behind the Beautiful Forevers, Katherine Boo

In Cold Blood, Truman Capote

How to Build a Girl, Caitlin Moran

Bluets, Maggie Nelson

H is for Hawk, Helen McDonald

The Liar's Club, Mary Karr

Unreliable Memoirs, Clive James

Beasts of No Nation, Uzodinma Iweala

Dave Eggers, What is the What

Katherine Boo, Behind the Beautiful Forevers

Al Alvarez, The Savage God

Jeannette Winterson, Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?

Jean-Dominique Bauby, The Diving Bell and the Butterfly

Maggie Nelson, Bluets

Tim Parks, Teach Us to Sit Still

Jon Ronson, So You Have Been Publicly Shamed

Roberto Saviano, Gomorrah

Subject specific skills

This module introduces students to the question of narrative in all its forms. It acquaints students

with the processes involved in writing narrative fiction and non-fiction, including traditional and experimental methods, revision, drafting, editing and considerations of audience, also endowing them with critical insights into works of contemporary and classic literature and the traditional and modern processes of literary production.

Transferable skills

generate original creative work

- grasp the importance of creative and intellectual experiment, risk-taking and process over product
 - demonstrate a working understanding of editorial skills
 - demonstrate a working understanding of issues around reading in translation
 - deploy a reflective approach to the process of composition;
 - embark on research to support their writing
 - deploy the rules, conventions and possibilities of written and spoken language in several forms
 - demonstrate a creative engagement with the expressive and imaginative powers of language
 - demonstrate a commitment to their own writing
 - read and respond critically to published work and to work in progress
 - engage with the historical and cultural dimensions of language use and literature, including media technologies
 - engage with others in order to improve their own and others' work
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Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	18 sessions of 1 hour 30 minutes (9%)
Private study	273 hours (91%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

Reading, writing & research.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time
Assessed essays/coursework	100%	
2x portfolio of 5,000 words each, comprising a 2,500-word work of fiction and a 2,500-word work of non-fiction		

Feedback on assessment

Written and oral feedback.

Availability

Courses

This module is Core for:

- Year 2 of UENA-QP36 Undergraduate English Literature and Creative Writing