

20th and 21st-century literature: looking forward, looking back

Start date July 8 2016 **End date** July 10 2016

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge

Tutor Prof Gina Wisker, PhD **Course code** 1516NRX126

Director of Programmes Emma Jennings

For further information on this course, please contact Clare Kerr, Public Programmes Co-ordinator
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Tutor biography - Dr Gina Wisker

Lecturer in English Literature

Gina Wisker has taught in Adult and Higher Education on literature and education courses for over 30 years. She specialises in twentieth and twenty-first century writing, Gothic, postcolonial and women's writing, and in teaching, learning and assessment. She has published sixteen academic books to date, eleven on literature and five on education, numerous journal articles, and four books of poetry. She is Co-editor of the journal *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* and of online poetry magazine *Spokes* and online dark fantasy journal *Dissections* and reviews for a number of literary and educational journals. Gina teaches interactively, using a mixture of interactive lectures and small group teaching.

Course programme

Friday

Please plan to arrive between 16:30 and 18:30. You can meet other course members in the bar which opens at 18:15. Tea and coffee making facilities are available in the study bedrooms.

19:00 Dinner

20:30 – 22:00 Session 1
Literature- poetry and prose- and ways we construct the past: through memory, research, archives, imagination, creative writing, and ghostly Gothic returns. Copies of poems will be made available.

22:00 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

Saturday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 – 10:30 Session 2
A.S.Byatt's *Possession*: exploring this novel as neo-Victorian Gothic, considering its ways of reimagining an era, its writers, and its values and pursuits.

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 Session 3
Possession: literary parallels, academic research and sleuthing.

13:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16:00 Free

16:00 Tea

16:30 – 18:00 Session 4
Margaret Atwood's *Stone Mattress*-Gothic, ghostly returns, relationships, narratives, community and family: 'Alphinland', 'Revenant' 'I Dream of Zenia with the Bright Red Teeth', 'Lusus Naturae.'

18:00 – 18:30 Free

18:30 Dinner

20:00 – 21:30 Session 5
Possession (Neil LaBute, 2002): how does the film adaptation of *Possession* relate to the text? Students are not required to watch this film before the course.

21:30 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

Sunday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 – 10:30 Session 6

Margaret Atwood's *Stone Mattress*: crime, revenge and the comic.'The Dead Hand Loves You' 'Stone Mattress'.

Ian McEwan's *The Children Act*: 'Victorian Gothic parallels contemporary relationships'

10:30 Coffee

11:00 – 12:30 Session 7

The Children Act, Law and life: McEwan's prose style and analogies between the complexities and contracts of the legal system, religion, relationships and the family.

12:45 Lunch

The course will disperse after lunch

Course syllabus

Aims:

- 1) To involve participants in the study of a representative selection of late twentieth and twenty first century texts, both poetry and prose.
- 2) To encourage the recognition of distinctive features and characteristic themes and styles in a selections of poetry and prose writing from the late twentieth and twenty first century period.
- 3) Through engagement with critical reading practices, make participants aware of different ways of reading texts such as structuralist, feminist, historicist, and to encourage critical debate.
- 4) To encourage participants to read with an awareness of cultural and historical context, both of the writer, and of the reader, and the ways in which this affects literary practice.

Content:

Sometimes our ways of understanding the past, history, and our pressing decisions lead to contradictory interpretations and dangerous results. A.S. Byatt's Neo- Victorian Gothic, *Possession* (1990) explores the parallel and intertwined lives of poets and researchers a century apart, revealing obsessions, hidden secrets and much about the sources of literature in personal lives. Margaret Atwood's most recent, lively and disruptive collection of short stories, *Stone Mattress* (2014), uses the Gothic, crime and the comic to revisit and reimagine different histories, focusing on relationships, families and friendships. *The Children Act* (2015) by Ian McEwan intertwines family laws, breakdowns, and rigidly held beliefs conducting a tale of other interlocking lives and showing that the balance and justice of relationships, life and the law are both relentless and tenuously held.

Presentation of the course:

Teaching and learning on the course will be a mixture of tutor led, research based input mainly as introductory lectures giving information and establishing key issues and critical perspectives, and much interactive group discussion involving close critical and appreciative reading, building our own understanding and interpretation of the texts, in context. Participants will be expected to share their readings of texts and discuss with others in the larger class and in small groups. Prior reading of the set texts is an essential foundation for study.

Learning Achievement/Outcomes:

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:
1.) Read prose (and some poetic) texts closely and analytically both for sensitive response and critical evaluation.

2) Respond to the different cultural, historical and individual contexts of texts and how these affect the way we read them, and make meaning.

3) Participate in sessions actively through comment and discussion, voicing critical responses to texts and reading.

4) Have developed a fuller knowledge of the specific texts studied on the course.

Reading and resources list

The essential reading

Author	Title	Publisher and date
A.S.Byatt	<i>Possession</i>	1990 Vintage
Margaret Atwood	<i>Stone Mattress</i>	2014 Bloomsbury
Ian McEwan	<i>The Children Act</i>	2014 Jonathan Cape

Listed below are a number of texts that might be of interest for future reference, but do not need to be bought (or consulted) for the course.

Ryan, Kiernan (1994) *Ian McEwan: writers and their work* . Northcote house

Wisker, Gina (2016 in press) *Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction* . London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wisker, Gina (2012) *Margaret Atwood : An Introduction to Critical Views of her Fictions*

Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Note Students of the Institute of Continuing Education are entitled to 20% discount on books published by Cambridge University Press (CUP) which are purchased at the Press bookshop, 1 Trinity Street, Cambridge (Mon-Sat 9am – 5:30pm, Sun 11am – 5pm). A letter or email confirming acceptance on to a current Institute course should be taken as evidence of enrolment.

Information correct as of: 21 June 2016