

Contemporary Fictions: experiments in storytelling

Credit / award Non-accredited

Start date 23 January 2017 **End date** 20 February 2017

Day and time Mondays, 19.00 - 21.00 **No of meetings** 5

Venue Madingley Hall
Madingley
Cambridge

Tutor Dr Andy Wimbush **Course code** 1617NWR003

Director of Programmes Emma Jennings

**For further information on
this course, please contact** Public Programme Coordinator, Clare Kerr
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To book See: www.ice.cam.ac.uk or telephone 01223 746262

Tutor biography

Andy Wimbush holds a PhD in English from the University of Cambridge. He specialises in the study of twentieth-century and contemporary literature, particularly experimental fiction, the relationship between literature and religion, and the work of Samuel Beckett and B.S. Johnson. His research has been published in *The Journal of Beckett Studies*, *Literature and Theology*, and various academic books. Andy has taught at the University of Cambridge since 2013 and is an Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy.

Course syllabus

Aims:

- To introduce students to a range of experimental fiction, mostly published in the last five years;
- To enable students to have a wide-ranging discussion about the nature of the novel form;
- To teach students how to read closely, paying attention to language, imagery, structure, syntax, and other elements of literary texts.

Content:

Session 1 (23rd January 2017): A tale of two tales: *How to be both* by Ali Smith

A discussion of Ali Smith's daring 2014 dual-narrative novel about gender, sexuality, and artistic creation, which won the Goldsmiths Prize for Fiction and the Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction.

Session 2 (30th January 2017): The gospel according to the novelist: *Quarantine* by Jim Crace and *The Testament of Mary* by Colm Tóibín

What happens when contemporary novelists retell a story that everyone knows? This session will explore two recent re-imaginings of the life of Jesus.

Session 3 (6th February 2017): Fragments of speech: *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* by Eimear McBride

McBride's startling debut novel from 2013 won the inaugural Goldsmiths Prize for Fiction, the Bailey's Women's Prize for Fiction and several others. We will discuss, among other things, its challenging treatment of trauma, power, family and speech.

Session 4 (13th February 2017): Love and the pursuit of wisdom: *Wittgenstein Jr* by Lars Iyer

How can a contemporary novelist discuss the meaning of life without seeming glib or trite? Iyer's wryly comic novel from 2014 is about studying philosophy under a beguiling and enigmatic Cambridge don in a world that seems to have less lofty priorities.

Session 5 (20th February 2017): A room of one's own: *Pond* by Claire Louise Bennett

James Joyce once told Djuna Barnes that she should 'never write about the *extraordinary*. That is for the journalist'. We will explore how Claire Louise Bennett's *Pond* (2015) brings the humdrum alive.

Presentation of the course:

This course will use a seminar format, focused on group discussion.

As a result of the course, within the constraints of the time available, students should be able to:

- Discuss literary texts in an analytical and reflective manner;
- Identify trends in contemporary fiction, and appreciate the ancestors of recent experimental writing in earlier movements such as Modernism;
- Analyse the relationship between a literary text's form and its content.

Reading and resources list

These books below must be bought and read before the course begins.

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Ali Smith	<i>How to Be Both</i>	Penguin 2014
Jim Crace	<i>Quarantine</i>	Penguin 1997
Colm Tóibín	<i>The Testament of Mary</i>	Penguin 2012
Eimear McBride	<i>A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing</i>	Faber 2014
Lars Iyer	<i>Wittgenstein Jr</i>	Melville House 2014
Claire Louise Bennett	<i>Pond</i>	Fitzcarraldo Editions 2015

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.

Author	Title	Publisher and date
Gabriel Josipovici	<i>Whatever Happened to Modernism?</i>	Yale University Press, 2011
Magdalena Maczyska	<i>The Gospel According to the Novelist: Religious Scripture and Contemporary Fiction</i>	Bloomsbury, 2015

Website addresses

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: 23 November 2016