

## 21st Century Fiction: writing now.

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**Start date** 8<sup>th</sup> March 2019 **End date** 10<sup>th</sup> March 2019

**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge

**Tutor** Dr Andy Wimbush **Course code** 1819NRX034

**Director of Academic Centres** Sarah Ormrod

**For further information on this course, please contact** Head of Academic Centre Administration, Zara Kuckelhaus  
[zara.kuckelhaus@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:zara.kuckelhaus@ice.cam.ac.uk) or 01223 746204

**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746262

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### Tutor biography

Dr Andy Wimbush holds a BA and a PhD in English from the University of Cambridge. He specialises in the study of 20th-century and contemporary literature, particularly experimental fiction, the relationship between literature, religion, and philosophy, and the work of Samuel Beckett and BS 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.

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## Course programme

### Friday

19:00 Dinner

20:30 Whatever Happened to Modernism? The contemporary novel and the return of the new

22:00 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Saturday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 *How to be both* by Ali Smith: Ekphrasis

10:30 Coffee

11:00 *How to be both* by Ali Smith: Gender and the gaze

12:30 Free

13:00 Lunch

14:00 Free

16:00 Tea

16:30 *A Brief History of Seven Killings* by Marlon James: Politics

18:30 Dinner

20:00 *A Brief History of Seven Killings* by Marlon James: Polyphony

21:30 Terrace bar open for informal discussion

### Sunday

07:30 Breakfast

09:00 *Lincoln in the Bardo*: Tibetan Buddhism and the afterlife

10:30 Coffee

11:00 *Lincoln in the Bardo*: Slavery and the Civil War

12:30 Free

12:45 Lunch

## Course syllabus

### Aims:

- To introduce students to innovative and experimental contemporary fiction
- To explore how contemporary literature is shaped by previous literary movements
- To examine contemporary novels in detail through close reading

### Content:

'Art,' wrote Ali Smith, in her essay collection *Artful*, 'is always about life-force and mortality'. This course takes two exciting and innovative contemporary novels and uses them to trace a path back in literary history. Through a close examination of Ali Smith's *How to be Both*, George Saunders' *Lincoln in the Bardo* and Marlon James's *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, students will learn about how the techniques and priorities of the modernist movement – writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce – are returning to contemporary fiction. We will explore how Smith, Saunders and James use this literary heritage to express what might otherwise be inexpressible: grief, violence, political upheaval, sexuality, gender, and identity.

Students will learn about how both writers are indebted to modernist literary precursors. Smith has acknowledged her debts to Woolf, Joyce, and Wallace Stevens, among others, while Marlon James draws on the work of William Faulkner and, like Saunders, incorporates modernist techniques of stream of consciousness narrative and polyphony. Students will see for themselves how this modernist legacy has helped shape a form of fiction that does not merely seek to illustrate or represent, but which wrestles with what can and cannot be said, and which seeks to marry content to form.

### Presentation of the course:

Class discussion; group work; lectures.

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

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

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## Reading and resources list

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Listed below are texts that might be of interest should you wish to supplement your learning on the course. Any essential reading is marked with an asterisk \*

### Primary Texts

\*James, Marlon. (2014) *A Brief History of Seven Killings*. London: OneWorld.

\*Saunders, George. (2017) *Lincoln in the Bardo*. London: Bloomsbury.

\*Smith, Ali. (2014) *How to be Both*. London: Penguin.

### Supplementary reading

Clark, Alex (2014) 'There are two ways to read this novel, but you're stuck with it – you'll end up reading one of them' [Interview with Ali Smith]. *The Guardian* (6 September). Available at: [www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/06/ali-smith-interview-how-to-be-both](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/sep/06/ali-smith-interview-how-to-be-both)

Germanà, Monica, and Emily Horton, eds. (2013). *Ali Smith: Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury.

James, David, ed. (2011). *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Josipovici, Gabriel (2010) *Whatever Happened to Modernism?* London: Yale University Press.

Taylor, Christopher (2015) 'Goings-on in the Tivoli Gardens' [A review of *A Brief History of Seven Killings*]. *The London Review of Books*. 37(21), 45-47. Available at: [www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n21/christopher-taylor/goings-on-in-the-tivoli-gardens](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v37/n21/christopher-taylor/goings-on-in-the-tivoli-gardens).

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## Additional information

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### Venue

Details of how to find Madingley Hall can be found on our website:  
<http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk/who-we-are/how-to-find-the-institute>

### Refreshments

Tea and coffee and lunch will be provided. If you have any specific dietary requirements or allergies and have not already advised us, please inform our Admissions Team on [ice.admissions@ice.cam.ac.uk](mailto:ice.admissions@ice.cam.ac.uk) or +44 (0)1223 746262.

**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:* 25 February 2019