

## Historical Fiction

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**Start date** 22 March 2020 **Time** 10:00 – 16:45

**Venue** Madingley Hall  
Madingley  
Cambridge

**Tutor** Elizabeth Speller **Course code** 1920NDX213

**Director of Academic Centres** Dr Corinne Boz

**For further information on this course, please contact** Head of Academic Centre Administration  
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**To book** See: [www.ice.cam.ac.uk](http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk) or telephone 01223 746 262

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### Tutor biography

Elizabeth's novels include *The Return of Captain John Emmett* (Virago, 2011 - Orange Book of the Month, Richard & Judy pick) and *At Break of Day* (Virago, 2014 - CNY State One Read 2015 in the US). They are published in eight countries. Her non-fiction includes *Following Hadrian* (Hodder/OUP US, 2004)) and a memoir, *The Sunlight on the Garden* (Granta, 2007). She was short-listed for the Forward Prize for Poetry and provided the libretto for Michael Berkeley's work *Farewell*, written in memory of Sir Paul McCartney's wife Linda. She has taught at Cambridge, Bristol and Birmingham Universities. She was Royal Literary Fund Fellow at the University of Warwick and is currently completing a further novel for Virago. She teaches on the Certificate, Diploma and MSt Creative Writing programmes at ICE.

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## Course programme

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Historical fiction is extremely popular with readers and it has become accepted as a literary form equal to the best contemporary fiction. Historical novels appear on all the major prize lists and are frequently the basis of television and film adaptations. We will look at the techniques and research that can turn the past into a compelling story. This will involve reading some fiction extracts but also trying out some writing exercises.

09:30	Terrace bar open for pre-course tea/coffee
10:00 – 11:15	<b>Historical fiction: what is it?</b>
11:15	Coffee
11:45 – 13:00	<b>Why do we read? Why would we write it?</b>
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 15:15	<b>How do we do it? What should we avoid?</b>
15:15	Tea
15:30 – 16:45	<b>Where can we find our own voice?</b>
16:45	Day-school ends

## **Course syllabus**

### **Aims:**

- To consider techniques for researching and writing historical fiction.
- To enable students to experiment and enjoy writing fiction set in a variety of different periods.

### **Content:**

Session One: Introductions. What is historical fiction and where are its boundaries?  
Why do we read it? Why has it become such a popular genre for writers?

Session Two: Looking at some examples of existing historical fiction, to test its advantages and pitfalls (the tutor will bring handouts).

Where can we find inspiration? What comes first: the story or research? And how much research does a work of fiction actually need?

Session Three: Resources: from the internet to national records to small objects, diaries, old newspapers or scraps of clothing, which might have a story hidden in them.

Exploring techniques, focusing on one given year in the past.

Session Four: Structure and dialogue: possibly the greatest difficulty for any writers of fiction set in the past. How can we sound right for both the period and a modern reader?

Exploring techniques around a second given year in the past

### **Presentation of the course:**

Discussion, reading, practical exercises. Watching some online archive film and images.

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

- To understand why historical fiction is such a popular genre and how it differs from other forms of fiction.
- To consider the relative usefulness of the many research possibilities that are now available to writers.
- To be able to start, or continue with, a piece of historical fiction.

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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 \*

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Author	Title	Publisher and date
Harrison, Melissa	<i>All Along the Barley</i>	Bloomsbury, 2016
Sansom, C. J.	<i>Dissolution</i>	Pan (new edition), 2015
Bake, Jo	<i>Longbourn</i>	Black Swan, 2014

## Website addresses

On being a historical novelist

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2017/apr/04/hilary-mantel-historical-fiction-cringing>

On history and historical fiction

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/all-history-lies-to-us-but-at-least-historical-fiction-admits-it/>

## TV/Film

It is worth watching historical films or television series to see how they turn history or historical novels into film. For instance, the recently released film, *The Favourite*, shows a very different Anne than in Joanne Limburg's *A Woman of Kindness* (Atlantic, 2016) or the historical account in Anne Somerset's *Queen Anne: The Politics of Passion* (Harper Press, 2012)

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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:* 24 April 2019