

## Preparing for the first year

We find that students often want to know how best they might prepare for university and especially what they might read before they get here. The most important thing to remember is that there is no 'compulsory' reading before the semester begins -- what we've put together here are simply some suggestions of how you might choose to use some of your reading time over the remainder of the summer.

On the first page, we've suggested a few introductions to literary studies, to drama, and to creative writing, which might whet your appetites for what's to come. Many of you will be taking 'Literature in History I' in the autumn semester, and so we've also included here a list of the books that make up some of that module's core reading -- if you're taking that module, you might well find it fun and reassuring to hit the ground running by reading one or more of these books; even if you're *not* going to be taking that module, this is still a short list of four wonderful books that you might enjoy! But rather than worrying too much about exactly what you'll be reading in the first semester when you get to UEA, we would most like you simply to read widely, following your own leads and interests and stretching yourself a bit by straying into areas and writings that are new to you. Some of our tutors have given you some tips on how you might go about doing that.

We hope, then, that this document gives you lots of exciting pointers towards things you might want to read -- but don't feel constrained by it, and please don't feel bossed around by it either; reading widely and enjoying yourselves is the best preparation for your new degree.

## Some general introductions to get you started...

### For all students:

Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle, *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory* (Routledge, 2016)

Clare Connors, *Literary Theory: A Beginner's Guide* (Oneworld, 2010)

Tory Young, *Studying English Literature. A Practical Guide* (Cambridge University Press, 2008)

### For Drama students, in particular:

Uta Hagen and Haskell Frankel, *Respect for Acting* (John Wiley, 2008)

Keith Johnstone, *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (Methuen, 2007)

### For Creative Writing students, in particular:

Al Alvarez, *The Writer's Voice* (Bloomsbury, 2005)

Andrew Cowan, *The Art of Writing Fiction* (Pearson Education, 2011)

Stephen King, *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft* (Hodder, 2012)

*The Paris Review Interviews Vols 1-4* (Paris Review)

## Some core reading for 'Literature in History 1' in the first semester...

Those of you about to embark on our courses in 'English Literature', 'English with Creative Writing', or 'English and American Literature', will all be taking the 'Literature in History 1' module in the autumn semester. This is a core module that introduces you to a sample of a huge range of literature from across time. That means it's a natural place for you to start on a bit of preparatory reading before the term begins.

This is a list of the books you're asked to buy for that module, and which will form some of the core texts you'll study (you'll spend about a week studying each book). Please remember that, for your seminars, you need to have the editions of the books specified here, as otherwise you won't be on the same page (literally!) as your friends in the seminar, which will make things awkward for you. Please also note that all these books will be available in the UEA campus Waterstones and discounts will be offered – 10% on each individual book and 15% if you buy the whole lot at once (which means the four books will be £28.92 in total). In other words, if you're buying any or all of them in advance of the semester, do be sure to hunt out cheaper prices or borrow copies from your local libraries; we don't want you to be out of pocket.

Here are the four books you're asked to buy for this module:

**L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (1953) – Penguin Classics Edition – UEA Waterstones price with 10% discount: £8.10**

Recounted by the narrator in his old age as he recollects a formative summer in his youth, before the two world wars, *The Go-Between* marks the passage from innocence to experience, and how memory relates to history, as the opening line declares: 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there'.

**Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy* (1587) – Norton Critical Edition – UEA Waterstones price with 10% discount: £7.15**

One of the most popular plays of the sixteenth century, *The Spanish Tragedy* will introduce you to the influential genre of 'revenge tragedy', as its characters enact endless cycles of injustice, betrayal, and death.

**Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1821) -- Oxford World's Classics Edition – UEA Waterstones price with 10% discount: £7.20**

Moving between autobiography, fantastic delirium, and the squalor of addiction, De Quincey's *Confessions* provides a personal account of the opium addiction that was widespread in Britain in the nineteenth century, and opens a dark window onto British colonial attitudes.

**Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, A West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831) – Penguin Classics Edition – UEA Waterstones price with 10% discount: £8.10**

The *History* is a challenging text which recounts Mary Prince's harrowing experiences as a slave in Bermuda and Antigua, and was a powerful voice for Abolitionism.

## Reading widely: hints and tips...

It's easy to encourage someone to 'read widely', but how should you go about doing that? We've asked some of our colleagues in the School of Literature, Drama and Creative Writing to give you their expert tips and advice...

### **Clare Connors writes about contemporary literature and literary theory. She suggests:**

You might think about setting yourself mini-reading projects to challenge yourself, and to keep broadening your range. So: did you read a Shakespeare tragedy or comedy for A-level (or IB etc)? Perhaps, then, decide to read a Shakespeare 'problem play' such as *Measure for Measure*. It's a play that falls oddly in-between tragedy and comedy - compare it with the Shakespeare you have already encountered. What poetry did you study for A-level? Perhaps invest in an anthology like Christopher Ricks's *Oxford Book of English Verse*. It is always hard to read an anthology from cover to cover, so set yourself more manageable tasks - reading 3 poems from each century, perhaps. Read each one through several times, and think about what it's saying and how it's saying it. How does it compare with poetry you've already studied? With novels - read something ultra up-to-the-minute. Ali Smith's *There But for The..*, for example. What is it doing differently from novels you've already read? What are the points of similarity? And then - what is the earliest novel you've read so far? Challenge yourself to read something by a different author from the same period - or even to reach back farther in time. This is the way to keep your literary-critical muscles exercised.

### **Karen Schaller is interested in all the myriad ways in which literature and the emotions relate to one another. She suggests:**

We encourage students joining us in the autumn to read actively over the summer and be thinking carefully about what you're reading and what questions it raises for you. The main purpose of the first year is to introduce you to the key practices and issues for your work as a literary scholar, so it would be really helpful if you could be thinking, now, about what questions drive you as a thinker and writer. If you've got particular interests in an author, period, or historical moment, read what you can get your hands on and be thinking seriously about why this interests you - what is it about the language, form, relationship between text and world that captures your attention? If you are drawn to a particular historical moment, I'd suggest reading both from that period, and later work that is about, or that re-imagines, that period. For example, one of my interests is in British fiction from the Second World War - writers such as Elizabeth Bowen, Patrick Hamilton, Betty Miller, Elizabeth Taylor (many of whom are rather neglected). But when I read Sarah Waters' contemporary novel, *The Night Watch*, I am really struck by the temporality of the text and what that has to say about how she is interpreting the problem of how to represent life during the war. You might also find your interests are more tied to particular questions of social urgency - race, or gender, or sexuality, or political legacies. Again, reading work that wrestles with these issues and asking yourself how the writing engages with them will stand you in good stead for the autumn.

### **Tessa McWatt is a novelist and director of the undergraduate course in English Literature with Creative Writing. She suggests (to Creative Writing students, in particular):**

Keep a writer's journal. Observe the world around you, listen and dream. Write a little bit every day. Go to literary events where you can hear writers talk about their work. Seek out writers and books that speak to your interests, your preferred style or voice. Explore the works of contemporary writers - those who've recently won literary prizes or those who are little known. Start to see yourself as a writer among them. You are.

**Will Rossiter works on everything from Chaucer to sixteenth-century sonnets, and he's just as passionate about Italian literature as about English. Here, he gives us his thoughts on what it means to read 'historically'...**

One of the key questions you will ask yourself in your first year, in one form or another, is “How do I read historically?” This is a simple question, but one that has numerous complex answers. You might have been encouraged in your studies so far to engage with historical contexts, but what counts as a historical context? An author’s biography? An understanding of the social and political backgrounds of the text? These backgrounds might be plural of course: if reading Charles Dickens’ *A Tale of Two Cities*, should one consider the historical context of the French Revolution (the novel’s setting) or the context of mid-Victorian England (when the novel was written)? If the answer is both, then how do those two contexts relate to one another? Perhaps we might consider that *all* history is textual, which might help us to go beyond text and context, foreground and background. Every text – whether it be a novel, a poem, a play, a historical record, a railway timetable, a clothing catalogue, or a gardening manual – is a product of its historical *moment*. So the text’s history is, in part, inside it, rather than found outside of it in contexts or backgrounds. You can try looking for the text’s languages of power, its discourses, which reveal its historical production – its economic language, its political language, its religious language, and so forth. Or you can look at its ways of saying, its rhetoric, its sentence structure -- these are all historical realities too, every bit as much as who happened to be king or queen when the text was written. This preparation does not involve reading a great deal more over the summer, but perhaps reading differently, of finding the text’s history *in* its language, not outside it.

**Tim Lawrence-Cave manages our Drama Studio. He suggests (to Drama students, in particular):**

The best thing that you can do is soak up as much theatre as possible. Go to see plays, read scripts, watch films and always look for work that challenges you and takes you beyond your comfort zone. If you already know a lot about Shakespeare's comedies, watch a Greek tragedy. If you're up to date with contemporary pieces, go and see a play by somebody earlier, such as Bernard Shaw. Explore the whole scope of the history of theatre and you can begin to discover the web that connects it all, from Aristophanes to Beckett, from Molière to Stoppard.

**Cath Sharrock knows everything about the nineteenth century, and much else besides! She concludes:**

We hope you find these suggestions helpful. But please, do not exhaust yourself by way of preparation! It would be much better to read a few texts that stimulate, inform and challenge you than a whole body of works that leave you worn out before you even arrive. With all your school or college work, you are wonderfully prepared already and what we most ask of you is that you come with an open mind and pen poised. We look forward to meeting and working with you all in the autumn.